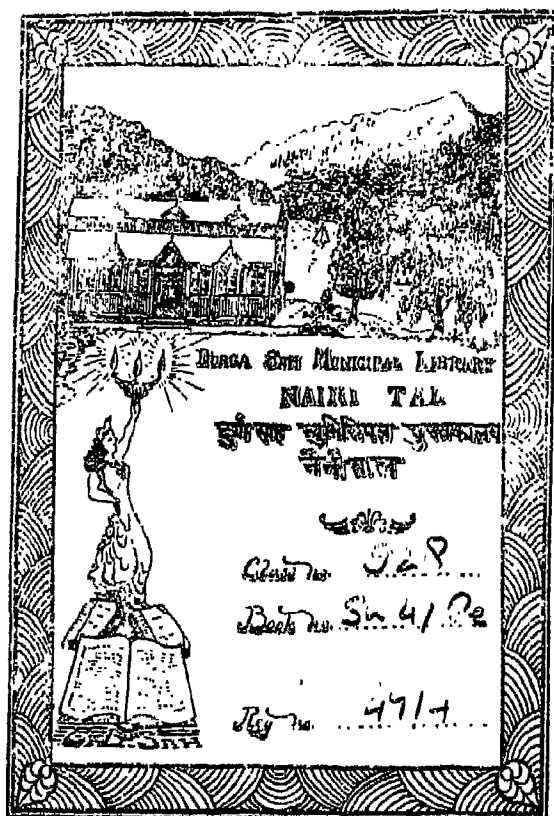




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THIS book is a Postscript to the biography of Bernard Shaw, by Hesketh Pearson, published in 1942. It continues the story from the point at which the biography left off, and describes the intimate discussions and not infrequent but always friendly disagreements which took place while it was being written. Hesketh Pearson was in constant touch with Shaw throughout the last decade of his life, and, with Shaw's knowledge, kept the biography up to date, noting down immediately after their occurrence accounts of their many discussions. Shaw subsequently recalled many things about his past which had previously escaped him, and so many fresh sidelights on Shaw and his contemporaries are included here. Not the least illuminating feature of this book is the obituary which Shaw himself contributed.

G. B. S.

A Postscript

By the Same Author

★

Biographies

BERNARD SHAW

DICKENS

THE LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE

THE SMITH OF SMITHS (SYDNEY SMITH)

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

LABBY (HENRY LABOUCHERE)

DOCTOR DARWIN (ERASMUS DARWIN)

THE SWAN OF LICHFIELD (ANNA SEWARD)

A LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

TOM PAINE

THE HERO OF DELHI (JOHN NICHOLSON)

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Reminiscences

THINKING IT OVER

Talk and Travel (with Hugh Kingsmill)

SKYE HIGH

THIS BLESSED PLOT

TALKING OF DICK WHITTINGTON

Letters (with Malcolm Muggeridge)

ABOUT KINGSMILL

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TRIALS
OF A BIOGRAPHER

G. B. S.
A POSTSCRIPT

By
HESKETH PEARSON

COLLINS
ST JAMES'S PLACE, LONDON
1951

To
ELEANOR O'CONNELL

*In gratitude for the most revealing
pages of this book.*

Durga Sah Municipal Library,
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PREFACE

THE FIRST part of this book deals with the difficulties I experienced while writing my *Life of Bernard Shaw*. It describes my talks with him, my successful attempts to extort intimate confessions from him, our constant disagreements, his outbursts over some of my inferences, and his repudiations of many stories that have grown up around his personality. This early portion, therefore, concerns the years 1939-40, when, with his active assistance, I was busy painting his portrait; and though every conversation was written down soon after it took place, these ten chapters were composed early in 1941 at the conclusion of my labours on his biography, a few passages being added to "A Shavian Production" following the death of Granville-Barker.

The second part describes Shaw's life from the date reached in my biography to the end of his career. They are thus a Postscript to that biography, which told his story up to the end of 1939 and was published in 1942. During those last years I was in frequent touch with him, and always knew what he was doing. Our arguments on all sorts of subjects, from Shakespeare to Stalin, were noted down by me immediately after their occurrence, and this part of the book contains verbatim records of our more notable encounters. He also remembered things about his past which had escaped his memory while I was writing his *Life*, and so I have been able to provide many fresh side-lights on himself and his contemporaries.

My readers will be as grateful as I am for Miss Eleanor O'Connell's remarkable account of Shaw's behaviour and conversation on the day of his wife's death, and for her

reports of his references to Charlotte Shaw in the ensuing months. Considering the extraordinary nature of my protagonist, I do not think there is anything more interesting and revealing in biographical literature than Eleanor O'Connell's contributions to the present work, which were written and sent to me within a few hours of the events and sayings recorded.

The remaining chapters of the book consist of my three articles, issued by The British Council, on Shaw the man, the reformer, and the playwright ; a brief introduction to the first of his writings that appeared in print ; and an obituary notice which I wrote for a leading London newspaper.

A BACK NUMBER

IF I had taken Bernard Shaw's advice to me in 1919 I should never have written his Life—nor anyone else's.

My first sight of him was at a dress rehearsal of *Androcles and the Lion*, which Granville-Barker produced at the St. James's Theatre on September 1st, 1913. The play was not a success, and Barker relapsed into repertory, Shaw's contribution being *The Doctor's Dilemma*, at the rehearsals of which I again saw the author. My own performances in both plays (Metellus in the first, the Secretary of the Picture Gallery in the second) made so little impression on him that when I wrote a book of reminiscences, *Thinking It Over* (1938), he remarked : "How little we may know of the people we think we know is illustrated by the fact that I never knew you had ever appeared on the stage until I read your book the other day. The funny part of your story is that though you were an out-and-out Bardolator you took no interest whatever in acting as an art, and left me persuaded that you must have owed your stage vogue to your good looks solely."

His pamphlet, *Commonsense About the War* (1914), started me on the road to Shavianism, and by 1916 I had read all his works, some of them two or three times. That year I wrote to him on behalf of Frank Harris, who was trying to interest his famous contemporaries in his book on Oscar Wilde. Shaw asked me to call and see him, "as it is annoying not to know what you look like." I was in the army at the time, but did not allow that to stand in the way, and by the aid of subterfuge managed to enjoy several long talks with him in Adelphi Terrace.

During my three years of service in Mesopotamia I corre-

sponded with him occasionally and became an out-and-out Shavian ; so much so that when I returned home he gave me the advice already referred to :

"Neither I nor any man of my generation takes the smallest interest in you, or can be anything to you but a snare. You must deal with the world as you find it, not as I found it. Of all literary bores and failures the most hopeless are the Don Quixotes who make Dulcineas of their pet authors and rush about breaking lances for them instead of doing honest original work. What do you suppose I should have been if I had spent my life pestering people about Ruskin and Carlyle, Mill and Herbert Spencer, instead of about Shaw ? It is true that I wrote books about Wagner and Ibsen ; but they were virtually my contemporaries ; and what I called attention to was not their music-dramas and plays, but a modern philosophy of life of which they, like myself, were exponents.

"Your bread and butter will never be safe until, in the language of the trench and the home, you allude to me contemptuously as 'a bloody old back number.' Don't talk about me, or write about me, or about Frank Harris, or about anybody over forty except the dead, and not too much about them.

"I really tremble for your future when I find you still going on exactly as you did before you got torn up by the roots and planted in the city of Haroun al Raschid."

I disregarded this and wrote an essay on him which appeared in my first book, *Modern Men and Mummies* (1921), a juvenile effusion which had the merit of courageous irresponsibility but little merit as criticism.

I sent the manuscript to Shaw, whose permission had to be obtained for the inclusion of three or four letters which he had written to me. He was understandably horrified by my indiscreet references to other persons, warned me of libel actions, and accused me of bad manners. He told me that Gerald Cumberland had recently published a book about living people with just my "recklessness," and had got into hot water over it. "The result was," said Shaw, "that his next book was so ruthlessly boycotted by the reviewers that both the writer and his publisher appealed to me—one of his victims—

to say a word for him in public !” Shaw then gave me a lesson in good manners : “ The more candidly you criticise, the more delicately you must draw the line between what may be said and what may not. In short, your manners must be as good as your brains if you are to make good your claim to criticise. You must give your man the republican respect that is due to him before you pull his work to pieces. Nothing is worse than a sneer, even though it may not incur damages.” As a result of his advice I cut out some of the offending passages, but did not sufficiently tone the book down to please all the people who appeared in it.

When a publisher made me an offer I sent the contract to Shaw for his comments, which were so forcefully expressed that I went to see him, and subsequently went to another publisher.

“ Hesketh, you are a dunderhead ! ” was the typically Shavian greeting.

“ Thank you. But why ? ”

“ This contract, man ! ”

“ What’s wrong with it ? ”

“ What’s *right* with it ? If you sign it you won’t make a penny. You are presenting your work to them, gratis ; and lest your widow should benefit by it, you are letting them have the profits for fifty years after your death.”

“ But it’s on a sharing basis,” I objected.

“ Sharing fiddlesticks ! You’ll share their overhead expenses—that’s all the sharing you’ll do. Are you completely devoid of business sense ? You should demand £50 down, 15 per cent on the first thousand copies, and 20 per cent on all sales above a thousand.”

“ Well, I’m afraid I’ve practically agreed to sign the contract as it stands.”

“ Oh, of course, if you want to give your work away with a pound of tea, no one can stop you. God help you ! Anyhow, there’s always the workhouse to fall back on. The only thing that surprises me is that you aren’t paying them handsomely to publish it for you.”

“ Then what do you suggest ? ”

“ I doubt if you’re worth saving, though your high opinion

of my work shows that you are not altogether a lost soul. If you like I'll refuse to let you publish my letters for a farthing less than £10 a word."

"I can't ask you to do that ; it wouldn't be treating them fairly."

"Then your wife must make the next move. Go home and tell her to divorce you. She's not safe with you. She must find a man with a large private income, or one who can make four out of two and two. This is a serious matter. You shouldn't be at large. Good-bye. And don't come to me for advice when you're in the bankruptcy court."

As the years went by I recovered from that early attack of Shavianitis and attained a balanced estimate of himself and his works ; though I am forced to admit that even when his public utterances seemed to me wrong, I preferred the gaiety of his wit to the gravity of other people's wisdom. There is no doubt in my mind that he was one of the outstanding "characters" of history, and the only considerable British dramatist since Shakespeare. I still think that his *Pen Portraits and Reviews* contains the wittiest, most stimulating and entertaining essays in the language ; while as a masterpiece of comedy, foolery and philosophy, I know nothing to approach *Androcles and the Lion*.

THE IRISH MUTINEER

IN THE spring of 1938 I was working on a Life of John Nicholson, which, entitled *The Hero of Delhi*, came out in the autumn of 1939. While so engaged I received an offer from a publisher to write a Life of James Barrie. Although not interested in Barrie and indifferent to his output, the offer was too good to be turned down without consideration ; so in the intervals of work I began to read his novels and plays. I also applied to several people who had known him, including Bernard Shaw, for reminiscences. The personality that emerged through his creations did not appeal to me, and I found the book he wrote on his mother so nauseating that I had to refuse the publisher's offer ; for I am incapable of writing at any length about a man who irritates or disgusts me. Shortly after my decision I heard from Shaw, who had been unable to write for some weeks owing to an illness. I afterwards incorporated the few personal notes he sent me on Barrie in his own life, the idea of writing which entered my mind as a result of something he said in his letter.

For a while it was only an idea. Firstly I was busy on Nicholson and could think of very little else. Secondly I have for years been of opinion that (a) the biography of a man should not be written until he is dead because of the temptation to praise the living, and (b) it should not be written by one who knew him personally because intimacy handicaps judgment : a man, like a mountain, is more completely seen from a distance. Nevertheless the idea germinated. There were, I reflected, special reasons which excepted Shaw as a biographical subject from the rules I had formulated. He was, or seemed to be, impervious to praise and blame. He sharpened, instead

of blunting, one's critical faculty. He was sufficiently detached about himself to encourage detachment in his biographer. He had survived his epoch and was the sole living authority on much that would perish with him. A thousand stories had grown up around him which he alone could reject or authenticate. And no biographer had yet tumbled to the fact that he was quite as remarkable a character as Voltaire, and ought to be boswellised. Archibald Henderson had twice written his life, Frank Harris had done it once; but their books were too full of Henderson and Harris. The other writers on Shaw had been chiefly critical or expository. But future ages will not want to know what we think of Shaw as a dramatist or philosopher, having their own opinions on the subject. They will want to know everything we can tell them about Shaw as a personality and will be willing to sacrifice over half his writings for a little private information about the author; just as we would willingly sacrifice over half of Shakespeare's plays for a few details about his private life. To be candid, however, I am not much interested in the wants of future ages, as I shall not be there to share them, and the determining factors were my liking for Shaw, my admiration for much of his work, above all my keen interest in his character, and the consequent certainty that I should enjoy writing his biography. My friend, Hugh Kingsmill, encouraged me to undertake it, and proposed it to Shaw in the course of a letter he was writing on some other subject. Shaw's reply appeared to favour the proposal. But when I followed it up with a letter, he replied by post card "Don't. I have got everything out of myself that there is to be got. My autobiography by Frank Harris has left nothing to be gleaned. The huge biography by Archibald Henderson laid his life waste, as I warned him it would. . . . I shall dissuade you personally any time you like to see me . . ."

I called at Whitehall Court on October 21st, 1938.

"I'm delighted to see you again, but you're wasting your time," he began. "There's nothing to be told about my life that isn't to be found in the Henderson and Harris books. Give it up, and let us talk about something else."

"If you imagine that those two lads have even skimmed the surface of your personality," I said, "you know nothing about the art of biography. It is absurd that you should feel satisfied with their efforts——"

"I never said I felt satisfied."

"Very well, then. You must not go down to posterity as the man who encouraged other biographers when I was alive to do you justice. I will guarantee not only to produce such a portrait of you and tell such a story as readers of Henderson and Harris will not recognise but to get far more really valuable biographical stuff out of you than anyone else, including yourself, has so far got. You see, I am an instinctive biographer: I can forget myself and I know what to look for."

After an hour or two of my fusillade he capitulated, saying "All right. Go ahead. You have my blessing." And afterwards he wrote me a letter authorising my undertaking.

He placed himself entirely at my disposal; and for some months I called to see him every week, when he dealt with my queries and talked away about his life and his contemporaries for an hour or two at a time. Once, as he was seeing me off in the hall of his flat, he asked "Have you begun to write the book yet?"

"No. But I shall start the moment I've finished what I'm doing now."

"What are you working on now?"

"John Nicholson. At present I'm dealing with the Indian Mutiny."

"Arra!" he exclaimed (or something that sounded very much like it): "Stop that and get on with the Irish Mutiny."

Another time I asked him for an introduction to a journalist who I had heard was full of Shavian anecdotage.

"No," he answered emphatically. "I propose to eliminate inventions from the book, not to add to them."

By the middle of December '38 I had finished with Nicholson and could give the whole of my time to Shaw, all of whose works I re-read with a biographical eye. Shaw himself was so helpful, answering all my questions, giving me introductions to people I wished to see, letting me obtain and quote his

unpublished correspondence, and so on, that one day I remarked that his kindness could scarcely fail to lessen my impartiality as his biographer.

“I think better of you than to believe that,” said he.

“I think better of you than to think you don’t believe it,” was my reply.

He laughed.

I managed, however, to maintain my detachment.

THE MYTHICAL G. B. S.

WHILE VISITING him regularly and reading his books I was also busy at the British Museum going through the reminiscences, biographies, letters, newspapers, magazines, and whatever else was published during his period that might in any way throw light upon his life and character. My wife helped me greatly with this part of my work, and together we exhausted the personalia of the age.

He quickly disposed of certain well-worn descriptions of him and certain traditions concerning him that had crept into the memoirs of the time.

"Keep that word 'puritanical' out of the story," he advised me. "Irish Catholicism is monastically and inhumanly puritanical. Irish Protestantism is snobbish and violently political; but it is not puritanical beyond the entirely irreligious Mrs. Grundyism of the bourgeoisie. There was not a trace of Puritanism in either of my parents."

I had got the impression that his father's failure as a merchant had been due to laziness. "A monstrous calumny," he declared. "My father was not lazy. He kept going without a holiday or being late at his office until he died."

In some book he was described in his early London days as looking like a fairly respectable plasterer. "The plasterer," he told me, "was one of Clarence Rook's jokes, made long after I wore good lounge suits among frock-coated tall-hatted men, as they all do now. I was a pioneer in dress when my poverty was over. No respectable plasterer would have been seen dead in the costume of a seedy gentleman, such as I wore in my poverty-stricken period."

In another description of his desperate days I read that he

had been reduced to a choice between "a bit of fire and a bit of supper" every night before going to bed. This, he informed me, was fabulous : "My poverty never ran to that."

His sartorial peculiarities gave rise to all sorts of stories, one of which has almost become a classic. I read a variation of it in Archibald Henderson's *Life of Shaw* (1911), which appeared to give it the seal of authenticity. So I noted down that when he became a dramatic critic the velvet jacket he wore at first-nights made the managers wince. One of them could not endure the sight of it, and instructed an attendant to deal with him. The attendant politely voiced the managerial objection.

"What do you object to—the velvet jacket?" asked Shaw.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I will take it off." He did so, and made for the auditorium in his shirtsleeves.

"Here!" cried the attendant, running after him, "that won't do."

"Won't do!" echoed Shaw indignantly. "Do you think I am going to take off any more?"

He put on his velvet jacket and took himself off without further ado.

When I showed this to Shaw, he expressed himself in a manner that made me wonder how it could have found its way into an "authorised" biography :

"All this is rubbish. I never possessed a velvet garment in my life. I never wore evening dress in the theatre (at the opera I had to) because it made it difficult for people to go to the theatre, and because 'what is good enough for Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament is good enough for the playhouse.' If a man of business may not enter a theatre on the impulse of the moment, or without going to his home in the suburbs to change his clothes and leave his fireside, thousands of otherwise saleable stalls will remain empty. George Alexander, an ultra-fashionable manager, heartily agreed. So did the experienced Augustus Harris. It was the acting manager, proud of his free list, who preferred deadheads in evening dress to paying stockbrokers in business clothes.

"All these stories are silly inventions. This one is the silliest, being obviously impossible. You must help me to explode them instead of reviving them to your own utter disgrace."

Not wishing to be utterly disgraced I took care to obtain his confirmation of every story and every fact in my book.

"But I'll tell you a true one about evening dress," he went on, "and how the newspaper lies cost me eight guineas when guineas were scarce with me. I was invited to dinner by the late Lord Haldane, then rising as Mister Haldane. Misled by the velvet jacket tale he asked me to come in morning dress. I concluded that it was to be a Labour dinner and that we were all to dress like John Burns. But I possessed nothing but evening dress and tweeds. So I had to buy a new suit specially for the occasion, in which I looked something between a ship's purser and a bank manager. In this rig-out I presented myself at the dinner, and was confronted with a blazing array of tiptop splendour, Haldane, Asquith and Balfour in evening dress, and the Souls, headed by Margot Asquith, Lady Jekyll and Lady Horner, blazing with diamonds and pearls, and the men with every order and decoration they could stick on. I enjoyed absolute uniqueness at the cost of eight hard-earned guineas."

"What happened?" I said. "Were you thrown out?"

"Not at all. I took Margot in to dinner, and bore myself as if I were the honoured guest and the only properly dressed man in the room. But I got no dinner. Haldane had evidently given the Whitehall Court caterers *carte blanche*; and they had risen to the occasion with every fish, fowl and flesh, every wine, spirit and liqueur procurable in London, but nothing that a vegetarian would eat. I had a scrap of bread and a glass of water. So please don't bring up this evening dress business again. It's a sore subject with me."

Some of my discoveries he described as "unconsidered remnants of obsolete Green Room gossip, which was always full of the popular notion that wit is only a form of ill-natured rudeness. I assure you I was always, like Shakespeare, 'a very civil gentleman.' Even as a critic my attacks had some-

thing flattering implied which, as Laurence Irving spotted, took the malice out of them. Ellen Terry, when the Henry Irvingites attacked me furiously, said that I was the only critic who had really done him justice." Yet his civility had an unaccustomed note in it. When I said that in his famous comparison between Sarah Bernhardt and Elcanora Duse in the part of Magda he had been inspired to do his best, he burst out "Blast you ! I *always* did my best. That was how the quality got into the criticisms. I am an artist, and cannot bear anything that I can better." To which I could only retort "Then on that occasion you were inspired to do better than your best." I doubt too whether the author of a comic opera named *Captain Thérèse* would have sensed anything "flattering" in the early G. B. S.'s notice of his work : "The first thing to do with *Captain Thérèse* is to cut out the plot. The next step will be to cut out the music, even at the risk of leaving somewhat of a hiatus in an entertainment which is, after all, advertised as an opera. . . . There is nothing else in *Captain Thérèse* that I could wish to see excised, except perhaps all the incidents and most of the dialogue. The characters may be retained, though the only one who does not seem entirely extraneous, and obviously dragged in for the sake of the performer, is Madame Sombrero, who does not appear."

In fact I could not wholly accept Shaw's statement that politeness had always been his strong suit. It reminded me of Dr. Johnson's illusion that his social manners left nothing to be desired. When a man is making his way in the world he is less considerate than when he has arrived at his destination, and Shaw's mellow view of himself was obviously not shared by his more touchy contemporaries. Nor for that matter was the later Shaw's view of the early Shaw shared by the early Shaw. When I suggested that his attacks on Shakespeare had been due to a perfectly natural desire to draw attention to himself he hotly contested the point, describing it as "a horrid libel." Yet as a critic of music he had written "I yield to no man in the ingenuity and persistence with which I seize every opportunity of puffing myself and my affairs," which is not

the usual policy of one who never thinks of drawing attention to himself.

As people grow older they forget how they felt in their early eager years, which explains why autobiographies written by those who have passed the age of sixty are quite valueless as to the pre-thirty period in their lives. Shaw, at forty-four, could still recall that he had built castles in the air, writing to Ellen Terry when she failed him over *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* "I have pitched so many dreams out of the window that one more or less makes little difference." But at the age of eighty-four he informed me "I never had any *dreams* about the theatre. It was the Green Room Club and the West End managers who dreamt. I was wide awake all the time." Equally he would not admit that occasionally the letters he had written to the newspapers had been libellous, though I had been told by one editor that several of his communications had been rejected on that ground by legal advice. "I never asked an editor to print a libel," the octogenarian Shaw assured me. "On the contrary I may claim to have set an example of good manners in public controversy which was a considerable advance on the old-fashioned invective. It would be true to say that the letters which produce most effect on a newspaper are sometimes those which it dare not print, and that I was fully aware of this." Here we have the cautious attitude of old age, coupled with a bad memory, of which he provided me with several examples. Two may be mentioned.

Concerning the first production of *Arms and the Man* he had written to a friend that only occasionally had he met a person who had been moved by the play "or by such portions of it as got played any better than a pantomime opening." He told me not to quote this "because Bernard Partridge, A. E. W. Mason and Alma Murray, the best of all the Rainas (I wrote the part for her), are still alive, and it wasn't their fault." Yet the letter containing the passage I wished to quote had already appeared in a book. Further he refused to let me use his own humorous description of a "certain actor's failure to grapple with a Shavian part. "He is still living and active," explained Shaw, "and it would be an unpardonable

breach of the sacred secrecies of rehearsal if I were to damage him professionally by betraying what was a serious mistake on his part leading to a withdrawal of a West End full dress play." But this description also had been published in *The Haymarket Theatre* by Cyril Maude.

In later life Shaw often went out of his way to placate people, and his efforts in this direction may have led him to believe that he had always been of a conciliatory disposition. An account he gave me of the manner in which he had changed the enmity of Sir Edmund Gosse into friendship illuminated both their characters :

"Gosse had always held both me and my works in abhorrence until I met him. He was staying with Lord Haldane at Cloan, and one day I motored over there from Glencagles. He looked extremely uncomfortable when he saw me ; so I made a point of sitting next to him and talking literature to him. I said that none of us had known anything whatever about the post-Shakespearean dramatists until he had written about them and put us permanently in his debt. This delighted him, and we got on like a house on fire. Ever afterwards, I heard, he spoke of me in his family circle in the highest terms."

Against that I must place an earlier episode which occurred when Shaw was about 54 and still vigorously troublesome. He would scarcely have remembered it when I was writing his biography, but fortunately he described it to me in 1916 when he was only 60 :

"My attitude to the war has made me very unpopular with the members of the Dramatists' Club ; but they never liked me ; I have been a constant thorn in their flesh. Some six years ago I caused an unholy rumpus at one of their luncheons. After they had drunk the health of the Club and were looking uncommonly pleased with themselves, I paralysed them by saying that, while I had never blackballed one of their candidates for admission, they had consistently blackballed mine. Following a long pause of shocked incredulity, each member trying his hardest to appear as if he had been mortally wounded in his most sensitive place, an absolute hurricane of recriminations swept the table. Challenged to name my

candidates, I mentioned St John Hankin, Hall Caine and Gilbert Murray. A veritable tornado of protests then rent the air : Hankin had offended everyone, he was hostile and socially impossible ; Hall Caine was a self-advertising monster who thought he was God ; he would behave as if he had bought the Club ; Conan Doyle and a dozen others wouldn't come to the lunches if Caine were present ; Gilbert Murray was not a dramatist, he had never written anything of his own, he was a translator of other men's works ; an excellent person, no doubt, but not ' one of us.' This went on for some time, and whenever the storm died down I raised it again to howling pitch with a few displeasing comparisons. Alfred Sutro made a brave attempt to reason with me, but the effort was too much for him and resulted in a frenzied declaration that in future he would blackball everyone proposed by anyone. I then remarked that members simply blackballed people they didn't like personally, and that henceforth, if they blackballed any one of my nominees, I should take it as a personal insult and blackball all of theirs. With a bark of rage Sydney Grundy accused me of placing my personal feelings above the interests of the Club. Then the shindy broke out afresh. When order was partially restored, I decided to teach them a lesson. I had noticed that Barrie was not present at the lunch, and as an example of how far blackballing should be determined by personal feelings I said that if Gilbert Cannan, who was living with Barrie's wife, were proposed as a member, I should certainly blackball him unless he were nominated by Barrie himself. Sensation ; during which I glanced round the room and caught sight of Barrie, who must have entered quietly while the tempest was at its height and heard every word I had just uttered. Of course he knew that I had been unaware of his presence, and it did not affect our friendly relations in the least, but it gave me a frightful shock at the time. Having presented my fellow-dramatists with something to bite on, I left them, and from the nature of the sounds that reached me beyond the door I fancied that they were discussing me."

APOCRYPHA

THOUGH WRITTEN primarily to amuse myself, these notes will be useful to biographers generally as an indication of the obstacles with which they are beset. Every remarkable man has stories invented about him and sayings fathered on him, because it is assumed that anything out of the way must have been said or done by someone out of the way ; and the more remarkable he is the more does he become the subject of legend. It is at all times the business of the honest biographer to question evidence that is not given at first hand, and even to weigh the credentials of those who supply the first-hand evidence. Especially is this the case when the biographical subject has been famous as a wit or an eccentric. Shaw was of course unique in every department : he gained a great reputation as a wit, as a philosopher, a dramatist, an eccentric, a speaker, a politician, a critic, and half a dozen other things ; and he was therefore peculiarly liable to become the theme of a thousand and one fables. Yet so many lies were told about him by people who knew him personally, and could witness to the truth, that one can only assume they were incapable of distinguishing between what they had imagined or dreamed, what they had heard from others, and what they had heard and seen themselves. This places the whole question of human testimony in a new light ; and though, as I have said, Shaw's case was as exceptional as Shaw, the story I have to relate will make would-be biographers pensive, and possibly dispirit them to such a degree that they will choose fiction as a safer and much simpler form of art.

Of lies at first hand I shall start off with a couple of whoppers from distinguished sources.

G. K. Chesterton states in his *Autobiography* that Shaw was present at a male party held in a vast tent in a Westminster garden, where the proceedings included the boiling of eggs in Beerbohm Tree's top hat, specially selected because it shone more brightly than the others. Shaw alone remained sober, and at one point got up, sternly protested, and stalked out.

"Chesterton's memory played him a trick," was Shaw's comment. "I usually avoided all social gatherings for men only, as men would not enjoy themselves decently in the absence of women. All that about a tent in Westminster, and boiling eggs in a top hat, if it really took place, is quite new to me. I wasn't there. But there was a male party in the house of a friend in Westminster at which I sat next Chesterton. After dinner, they began throwing bread at one another; and one of them began making smutty speeches. They were actually drunk enough to expect a contribution from me. I got up and went home. You must remember that I am a civilised Irishman, and you cannot civilise an Englishman, nor an Englishwoman either, except superficially. When I first saw an assembly of respectable and sober English ladies and gentlemen going Fantee, and behaving like pirates debauching after a capture, I was astounded. I am used to it now; but it is not possible for me to take part in such orgies."

In the course of a book of reminiscences the actor, Charles Hawtrey, recalls that Shaw read *You Never Can Tell* to him. Much impressed, Hawtrey said "I'll produce your play."

"Oh, I hope you won't," replied Shaw.

"But I will. I think it's awfully clever."

"There are some days when I think it is, and others when I think it's not," returned Shaw. "This is one of the days when I think it's not."

Hawtrey insisted that he would like to do it, and Shaw seemed inclined to agree. But when the actor suggested a few cuts and alterations the author flatly refused: "I couldn't allow a single word to be altered."

"Well, then, I'm afraid I can hardly undertake to produce the play," said Hawtrey.

"Thank you!" exclaimed Shaw, jumping up and shaking

Hawtreys warmly by the hand : " Thank you. You've taken a great load off my mind."

I produced this circumstantial account for Shaw's verification. " It is simply untrue," he asserted. " Arnold Daly published it in America ; and when I protested on the ground that it was grossly rude to Hawtreys, with whom I was on the best of terms, Daly said ' But I had it from Hawtreys himself.' No doubt he had ; but I was quite innocent. My witticisms do not take the form of bad manners, nor, as in this case, bad criticism ; for Hawtreys would have been an ideal Valentine."

Apparently Hawtreys's reminiscences, *The Truth At Last*, had been misnamed.

For another mendacious statement an author, Arnold Bennett, must share the responsibility with a theatrical manager, J. E. Vedrenne. In January, 1908, Bennett met Vedrenne, who said that for the past four years he had been paying Shaw £4000 a year in royalties at the Court Theatre. Bennett noted the fact in his journal. Shaw convinced me that it was fiction : " Wild nonsense ! £4000 a year means £77 a week. If the theatre had been crammed to capacity every night, and no plays but mine performed, it might have occurred ; but it never did." Shaw told me that when Vedrenne completely and finally cut loose from Granville-Barker (" they were fundamentally incompatible ") he exploited his reputation successfully as a commercial manager ; so we may infer that his statement to Bennett was a bit of self-puffery. Bennett did not like Shaw, as one can tell from his journals ; but when I suggested that he was jealous of Shaw's conversational fluency, Shaw would not have it : " Bennett was not envious ; quite the opposite, I should say. I fancy my way of handling his own opinions took him out of his depth a bit."

Which reminds me that several people had openly stated that Shaw's campaign against Irving was due to personal irritation, caused by Irving's failure to produce *The Man of Destiny*. " I never felt any irritation," he assured me. " Irving's connection with the play was an entanglement from which I wanted to escape. Besides—important in this connection—

The Man of Destiny was an old-fashioned play, as completely pre-Ibsen as Sardou or Scribe."

Shaw told me how he had prevented Lady Irving from opposing her husband's burial in Westminster Abbey, and this I recorded in my book ; but it may be of interest to future historians of the stage if I here tell more of the story, as I received it from Lady Forbes-Robertson, whose brother-in-law, Norman Forbes, first went to see the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral about Irving's burial there. The Dean was very haughty and abruptly refused his permission, adding " *I shall be buried here, you know.*" Norman Forbes next approached the Dean of Westminster, who said it would only be possible if the body were cremated and the permission of the sons obtained. Both conditions having been agreed to, the Dean asked whether it was certain that people wanted Irving to be buried in the Abbey. Yes, he was told, they did want it. Still unsatisfied, he insisted that Johnston Forbes-Robertson, for whom his brother Norman was acting, should get two signatures from each profession backing the appeal. Pre-paid wires were promptly dispatched to all sorts of eminent folk, only two of whom refused their support : Lord Rosebery, because he thought the Abbey was too crowded already ; and Sir Edward Clarke, schoolfellow and lifelong friend of the famous actor, who said he did not see why Irving should be thus honoured.

To return to Shaw, I extracted another story he would not pass from a book on a famous dancer : *With Pavlova Round the World* by Theodore Stier. One day, it ran, Shaw walked into the Court Theatre when Granville-Barker, Gilbert Murray and the musical director were discussing the music for Murray's translation of a play by Euripides.

"Sheer waste, expending time and energy on all this rubbish," Shaw is reported to have said.

"What d'you mean—rubbish?" exploded Murray.

"Oh, not you, Murray—I mean Euripides," answered Shaw, retreating rapidly.

As Shaw considered the production of Murray's translations the highest achievement of Granville-Barker's management, I was not surprised when he described this tale as "nonsense !

Absolutely without any foundation." Yet, although I excluded it from my book, I do not think it at all improbable. At the age of 84 Shaw could scarcely have remembered every quip he had made since the age of 30, and this one was so obviously a leg-pull that no one would have minded it. In the same category may be placed an episode during the rehearsals of *Pygmalion*. My authority for it was Cecil King, then stage-manager at His Majesty's Theatre ; and though Shaw called it "untrue and impossible," I am inclined to think it as true as it was possible. The rehearsals were maddening and chaotic, as always with Tree, and Shaw admits that twice he shook the dust of the theatre from his feet, with no intention of returning. On one of these occasions, Cecil King told me, Shaw informed Tree that he would never come back on any pretext whatsoever ; Tree expressed his fervent gratitude ; Shaw disappeared ; and the rehearsal proceeded. After a few minutes Shaw's voice was heard from the darkness of the dress-circle : "Stop ! I've come back for my umbrella."

I collected a number of small details about him at rehearsals which, though each was insignificant in itself, together gave a clear impression of his free-and-easy manner on such occasions. The sources from which I obtained them were unimpeachable, most of them trustworthy eyewitnesses, and this is what I wrote :

Shortly after the war there was a Shaw boom among the repertory theatres scattered about the country, and Charles Macdona toured the plays through the provinces with success. To Macdona's suggestion that he should invest some money in the enterprise, Shaw replied "Thank you, but I do not wish to spend the evenings of my days in the workhouse, and the fact that you would be there too would not be sufficient consolation." The Everyman Theatre at Hampstead thrived on his works, and occasionally he made an appearance at the final rehearsals. He was like no other producer on earth : he did not claim infallibility, never pretended his plays were anything better than knockabout farces, gave the performers complete self-assurance, and, even when forced to tell an actor how bad he was, did so in a burst of friendly confidence that wholly disarmed him and

seemed to be in the nature of a joke strictly between themselves. "Someone says that you are too soft in this act," he remarked to one fellow: "Now you were so soft that I couldn't hear a word you said." The overstatement removed the sting. To another: "Well, my friend, it's not at all as I imagined the part, but I've no doubt it's a great deal better." A leading actor was asked by the rest of the company to tell Shaw that the leading actress was invariably drunk. "Yes, yes, I know," was the reply: "but I'd rather have her drunk in the part than any other actress sober." One day an argument started on the stage concerning the correct pronunciation of "matutinal." Shaw cut it short with "This is a free country; you can pronounce it as you like." He could join heartily in a laugh against himself. "Why not come on to the stage singing some topical song, say 'Another Bit of Sugar for the Bird'?" he suggested to an actor, who however appeared to be ignorant of the song. Shaw promptly jumped up and made an entrance warbling the ditty. "Surely you know that," he said. "Of course I do," rejoined the actor, "but I couldn't miss the chance of hearing you sing it." At one rehearsal he advised a thoroughly experienced player to pass behind the table at a particular moment; at the next he advised him to pass in front of it. "But, Mr. Shaw, you told me yesterday to go behind the table." "Oh, did I? Well, that just shows the danger of paying any attention to what I say." After the final curtain on a revival of *Man and Superman* at the Everyman Theatre there were calls for the author, very visible in the stalls. He rose, said "Ladies and Gentlemen: in two minutes the author will not be in the house"—and made good his declaration.

Shaw's comments on this were brief and pointed: "Utter rubbish! Not a word of truth in it! The silliest Green Room gossip!" That being his opinion, I omitted the passage from my book, but I reserved my own opinion.

That he was not altogether certain of the truth or falsity of such incidents became clear when I submitted for his approval three stories I had extracted from the memoirs of musicians:

1. At a performance given by a certain string quartet G.B.S.'s companion remarked "These men have been

playing together for twelve years." "Surely we have been here longer than that," said G. B. S.

2. Shaw detests music with meals, and once asked the leader of a band "Could you play something if I asked you to?" "But certainly, sir." "Well, would you play either poker or dominos—whichever you like—until I have finished my dinner?"
3. "What do you think of the violinist?" asked the hostess of a music party. "He reminds me of Paderewski," replied Shaw. "But Paderewski is not a violinist." "Neither is this gentleman."

"No. 2," Shaw informed me, "is a lie. Nos. 1 and 3 I do not remember, though they are funny enough to be fathered on me. But they have been quoted so often that they have an ancient and fish-like smell. I cannot guarantee them."

He was rather surprised when I discovered that a story which his official biographer Archibald Henderson considered apocryphal had appeared in one of his own early articles as a critic of music. Every Shavian has heard how, in response to an organ-grinder's request for a donation, Shaw muttered "Press" and passed on. "This entirely untrue story," wrote Henderson, "was invented by the late Arthur Bingham Walkley as a retort to Shaw's pretence that the word Press, on the bell button beside Walkley's hall door, was an announcement of his profession." If Henderson had turned up Shaw's article in *The Star* for March 8th, 1889, he would have read the following: "Two cornet performances have left an abiding memory with me. One was M. Levy's variation on Yankee Doodle . . . at the inauguration of Buffalo Bill. . . . The other was The Pilgrim of Love, played by an itinerant artist outside a public house in Clipstone Street, Portland Place. The man played with great taste and pathos; but, to my surprise, he had no knowledge of musical etiquette, for when, on his holding his hat to me for a donation, I explained that I was a member of the press, he still seemed to expect me to pay for my entertainment: a shocking instance of popular ignorance."

I received a final proof that Shaw's memory was not wholly reliable when, after telling me that he had written no letters to Florence Farr, several came to light, and were published by his permission.

It must be said that Shaw himself was partly responsible for the legends that gathered round him. He believed in what, for want of a proper word, I shall call "tries": that is, a combination of truth and lies. He declared that a literal account of anything is neither true nor false; and so, in order to achieve essential truth, he would embroider an episode, and sometimes even invent one, as in his account of dancing round Fitzroy Square with a policeman in the early hours of the morning. One of his published stories, about a grandfather's clock, has been taken as a record of fact by a lot of readers, because it introduces the names of real people in the Labour movement. I mentioned this to him, and he was quite astonished. "How could anyone believe it to be a record of facts? It couldn't be! It is a study of a type that is a frightful nuisance in all revolutionary movements: the Impossibleist." Although Shaw's story is an obvious joke, the trouble with this sort of thing is that there is no end to it, and after twenty years of fictionised biography many of us pick up the tedious but reliable two-volume Victorian "Life and Letters" with a sense of relief. If a biography or a personal "portrait" is not as faithful to fact as the writer can make it, its value is nil. The biographer's creative imagination has full play in his selection of the material, his presentation of the subject, his skill in delineation, his power of intuition.

Other people's inaccuracies were spotted quickly enough by G.B.S., witness his derisive comment when reviewing a book on Wagner which exposed the absurdities in another book on Wagner: "The sensational incident of the woman falling shot, and Wagner heading a charge on the Prussian soldiers and capturing them, turns out to be just as true as might have been expected: that is to say, the woman was not shot; the soldiers were not captured; and Wagner was not present; but the story is otherwise founded on fact."

He was pernickety, too, over small points in my *Life of*

himself. When I referred to his Irish "brogue" he corrected me sharply : " That is a common English blunder. A Dublin accent is no more a brogue than a Cockney accent is. It is much less attractive. Cork, Kerry, Galway have brogues, all quite different and all musical ; but Leinster Irish, especially Dublin Irish, is like Hoxton English, which nobody classes with the English of Somerset or Westmoreland."

On another occasion I stated that Edmund Yates, for whom Shaw wrote music criticisms, would be spending the greater part of his life in the law-courts or in gaol if he were editing a paper to-day with the courage and freedom he exercised on *The World*, the present age being far more squeamish, and fearful of giving offence to important people, than the Victorian. Shaw at once pulled me up : " That won't wash. Yates was actually imprisoned for libel. The most you can say is that there may be more blackmail by speculative solicitors (Dodson and Fogg) than there used to be, and this you cannot prove." He was wrong of course. The mere fact that Yates was imprisoned for libel proves it. How many editors during the last twenty years have been within measurable distance of incarceration for risking the truth ?

Three more minor details did not escape him. His early plays were written for the most part on the tops of buses and in underground trains. I remarked that the jolting of the carriage and the whistling of the engine must have hindered concentration. " The underground engines never whistled," he replied. Referring to his first money-maker in the theatre, I observed that *The Devil's Disciple* had run for eight weeks in New York in 1897. " Nonsense ! " said he. " Eight weeks would have been a failure. It had a long run and established Richard Mansfield for the first time in a theatre of his own in New York." " Then you must fight it out with your official biographer," I retorted. " In Henderson's latest tome on you he says the play ran eight weeks." Another flat contradiction came from him when I talked of *Fanny's First Play* as his first west-end success. " Absurd ! " he broke in. " The Little Theatre was less ' west-end ' than the Court, where years before *John Bull's Other Island* had drawn Royalty and the

Cabinet, and *You Never Can Tell* was another *East Lynne*. My first big box-office successes were in New York (Mansfield in *The Devil's Disciple* and Robert Loraine in *Man and Superman*) and in Germany (Agnes Sorma in *Candida*)."

Lastly, when I drew his attention to the statements in Hector Bolitho's book on Marie Tempest that he had refused to let her play the part of *Candida* while she was in Australia, and had declined to take any part in her Jubilee, he remarked "Entirely wrong," and went on to describe something that had happened over fifty years before :

"One day a lady named Agnes Consuelo called at our house in Fitzroy Square. She wanted singing lessons from my mother, who was not at home. 'But don't let that worry you,' I said. 'Come in and I'll teach you.' She came in and I gave her a lesson. Some time later I went to see her in a play she had produced. She was utterly obliterated in her own show by a girl named Marie Tempest, who sailed on, sang a song, and completely captured the audience. From that moment Marie went from strength to strength. She was intelligent enough to copy all Charles Wyndham's stage tricks for producing laughter and tears, and built up her reputation on them, plus her own personality."

All of which shows that, even if Shaw could not remember every joke he had made in half a century of public life (as who on earth could ?), his memory was sound enough on the plain facts and circumstantial episodes of his own career.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

SHAW TOOK his work on the Fabian Society, and his fellow Fabians, with deadly seriousness. I found that he could joke on every other topic, but on the subject of the Fabians and their social efforts his sense of humour seemed to be in abeyance. I was constantly being reproved by him for taking less account of his politics than of his art. To me his essays on his contemporaries were much more enlightening than all his Fabian essays put together ; and I infinitely preferred the comedian who wrote a scene from *Macbeth* in the style of a modern novelist and the last act of *Cymbeline* in Shavian blank verse to the preacher of his imposing Prefaces and Guide-books on science and sociology. Eventually I had to pull myself together and face up to the fact that the municipal councillor in him was no joke ; and though I never mastered my amazement that a man capable of writing *Androcles and The Lion* could waste his time over drainage systems, which any fool of a councillor can chatter about, I yet managed to treat his political character with the gravity which he felt was due to it.

From the beginning I had known, and fully sympathised with, his hatred of poverty, and no words ever spoken in church or chapel had been so deeply impregnated with the spirit of religion as those he had once addressed to a congregation from the pulpit of the City Temple : " Don't go about with long faces sympathising with the poor and with ill. Take poverty and illnesses in extremely bad part ; and when you meet a man whose wife is ill or who is poor, don't say to him that it is the will of God, which is a horrible blasphemy. Tell him in solemn Scriptural language that it is a damnable thing, and that you have come to try to put a stop to it because *you*

are the will of God. And then you will have put the man you are talking to on the high road to understanding that his will is the will of God too."

Nevertheless I did not see why Shaw as a Fabian should be treated as a necessarily more serious person than Shaw as a critic or dramatist, and in my first attempts to explain the Shavian Fabian he was constantly hauling me over the coals. "You must get the Green Room conception of Shaw as a joker completely out of my Fabian side," he admonished me. "The cap and bells never jingled there. My Fabian colleagues were in many ways abler and better informed than I. They educated me quite as much as I educated them; and your notion that I gave the Society its brains is quite absurd—obviously so in view of their careers. Without them I should have been as futile as Matthew Arnold or any of the other eloquent-on-paper socialists who had not to satisfy very critical councils of their intellectual equals. Socialism was our religion; and we were as earnest about it as the Communion of Saints."

What he called "the Green Room conception of Shaw" had undoubtedly crept into the memoirs dealing with the political currents of the time. In one book I read that his method of obtaining notoriety in the days when he used to haunt public meetings was to send up his card to the chairman at the conclusion of a speech. On the card was written, "Mr. Bernard Shaw would like to ask a question." The chairman, never having heard the name but wondering whether his education had been neglected, announced that "Mr. Bernard Shaw would like to ask a question." A tall red-haired man then rose and asked a particularly irritating question, which stuck in the audience's memory along with the name and appearance of the questioner. Thus Shaw became famous wherever two or three were gathered together for instruction and argument; which presumably settled his nerves and satisfied his nature. This account by an eyewitness, who must have been a cross-eyed witness, was promptly vetoed by Shaw: "Rubbish! Most of the people at the meetings had no cards. Only a few of them put questions as part of

the routine. One just got up and spoke ; and the chairman was only too glad to have the debate kept going. There was no fame to be got out of it." In another account of his early political doings it was stated that he had attended the first meeting of the Independent Labour Party, at which he made such a nuisance of himself that he was expelled from the platform to the gallery, where he made so much more of a nuisance of himself that he was asked back to the platform. "This is not what happened," Shaw told me. "The Committee challenged the credentials of the Fabian Society, which was not a trade union nor a socialist society *by name*. I retired to the gallery in my most gentlemanly manner until the meeting decided that the Fabian Society was eligible, when I returned to the body of the hall. I knew better than to make a nuisance of myself."

Many stories have been told and printed of his levity on platforms. I picked out two for my biography, the first from a friend who had heard it from someone who had been present, the second from a book :

1. He was addressing a meeting in Dublin when several local potentates were on the platform, a barrister, a bank manager, a physician, and other city nob. Shaw opened his speech with "I haven't the faintest idea who these people on the platform are, but I don't suppose they are of any importance." Needless to say everyone who was not on the platform took this in good part.
2. An audience that had assembled to hear him on the subject of Shakespeare was warned by him of what had happened at a similar gathering : "I hope you will be more fortunate than the last audience I intended to address on Shakespeare. On that occasion the chairman, in introducing me, made an elementary mistake in economics. I had to correct him. It took me the whole evening, and I never got to Shakespeare at all."

Shaw gave me his comments on the above : "These are pure fiction. They suggest that I habitually trifled with my audiences, which I *never* did. I knew better."

I suppressed the stories. Yet, though he may not have

trifled with his audiences, he once admitted to me that "I stood my audiences so completely on their heads by my assaults on their illusions and superstitions that many of them went home not knowing what to think."

The general impression conveyed by the writers of political reminiscences is that Shaw was constantly mounting the cart in Hyde Park, but he assured me that this was not so : "I was not a Hyde Park orator, the West End not being my hunting ground (I preferred the dock gates). Of course I spoke there at the May Day celebrations and other big demonstrations, as every other speaker did ; but I can remember only one ordinary propaganda meeting at which I spoke. It rained like mad all the time and my audience consisted of four policemen. I spoke very well in my effort to convert them." His memory was not quite accurate in this case, as he has provided evidence in letters and elsewhere of one or two other quiet appearances as a speaker in Hyde Park ; but what he told me was roughly true, and his early audiences were mostly in the east end, where he was sometimes subjected to heckling of a rather crude order. Once, he told me, a not quite sober socialist soldier blundered into a humble committee room, and was presently referred to Shaw as an example of the advantages of teetotalism. The soldier promptly denounced Shaw as a liar and a hypocrite, affirming it to be a well-known and inexorable law of nature that no man with money in his pocket could pass a public house without going in for a drink. To this Shaw had no answer but the blunt fact that he always had the price of a drink and had never been in a public house since his nursery maid took him there when she met one of her sweethearts and was treated by him. The soldier could not swallow this without the aid of another drink.

Shaw's refusal to let his Fabian colleagues be treated in a spirit of levity was shown in a marked form when I retailed an incident which I had found in *Pilgrim to the Left* by S. G. Hobson, who had served on the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society. According to this gentleman the proceedings in committee were occasionally enlivened by the leg-pulling of the secretary, E. R. Pease. For example, at one meeting

Pease reported that ten years previously he had put into the balance sheet 10 per cent for depreciation, which had covered the cost of the office furniture. Immediately someone suggested that as he had been annually deducting 10 per cent he must have £120 tucked away somewhere. This was simply malversation, punishable by six months hard labour. Someone else expressed surprise and pain : he could not have believed it of Pease ; but the punishment must be made to fit the crime. Then Hubert Bland took up the running. Looking very grave he said that as treasurer he was responsible and must shoulder the blame. Whereupon it was agreed that, while it would be delightful to put Pease away for six months, the bare thought of Bland accompanying him was altogether too delicious for words. The committee was brought back to business by another member, who said that if Pease and Bland could not settle a simple point of accountancy they should both be taken out and drowned.

"All this is rubbish !" exclaimed Shaw. "Nobody ever made fun of Pease, or pulled his leg. Whatever bit of fun may have given a start to this impossible story, it is quite out of character ; for the Fabians were deadly in earnest, and would not stand any silly waste of time when there was business in hand."

In the eighties, when the socialist movement was in its infancy, there were four main groups. Of these the two most important were the Fabian Society and the Democratic Federation. The last-named, which later became the Social-Democratic Federation, was the first political group in England to advocate Marxism, and its leader was H. M. Hyndman, who ruled his followers like an autocrat. Having neither known nor seen Hyndman I had to picture him from his own memoirs and the writings of others, and the result, though friendly, was not flattering. From a book by one of Hyndman's disciples, who claimed that he was present at the scenes reported, I described a flare-up between Shaw and Hyndman, my account running as follows :

"H. M. Hyndman, who always wore a frock coat and top hat, reminded Shaw of Blake's pictures of God because of his

beard, compared with which Shaw's own sprouting was 'so like a tuft of blanched grass that pet animals have nibbled at it.' Hyndman was Marx's most fervent English disciple; he had received the usual public school and university education of his class and lived on a comfortable income. Like all who believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat, he was by nature an absolute autocrat, demanding complete obedience from his followers and running the Democratic Federation in a manner so imperious that Shaw described him as 'the worst leader that ever drove his followers into every other camp to escape from his leadership.' In his view Marx was the only God and Hyndman his only Prophet. Naturally enough he hated the exposures of Marx's economics by Shaw, whose behaviour bereft him of words. Indeed everything about Shaw got on his nerves: he could not even watch his vegetarian comrade eating the whites of fried eggs after a public speech without a feeling of horror, and politically speaking he wrote Shaw off as a buffoon. An early clash brought out their dissimilar temperaments.

"The Democratic Federation had an office and lecture hall at the top of an ancient and dilapidated house in the Strand. Shaw used occasionally to carry his bicycle up the three flights of dark narrow stairs, argue with any of the comrades who happened to be there, stir them up, and carry his bicycle down again, careless or unconscious of the criticisms that were levelled at his back: 'He's the biggest bally fool God ever made!' 'Can't think straight for two minutes on end.' 'Says he knows more than Karl Marx.' 'Must be dotty!' and so on. But one of the comrades was struck by his intelligence and asked him to lecture the Bermondsey Branch. He agreed to do so, and turned up punctually on a chilly Sunday night, to find four members crouching over a stove. He sat by the chairman on the platform for half an hour glancing through his notes. When the audience consisted of eight, he suggested a start, and gave as much care to his speech as if he had been addressing eight hundred. The stove-pipe smoked, the listeners smoked pipes, and the atmosphere became so thick that everyone felt drowsy; while the chairman,

after manfully fighting it off for a while, fell into a deep slumber. When Shaw had completely demolished Marx, he sat down and the chairman woke up. No one being sufficiently wide awake to ask questions, the meeting terminated with the chairman's vote of thanks for a great intellectual treat, coupled with the assurance that they all agreed with every word the lecturer had uttered.

"Some time later there was a debate between Hyndman and Shaw on the subject of Marx, in the course of which Shaw declared ; ' Marx is as dead as mutton : I have killed him.' He added that he had convinced a Branch of the Democratic Federation that this was so, for not only had the chairman fallen asleep for want of something to disagree about, but the audience had approved his views by passing a unanimous vote of thanks. Hyndman promptly jumped up and bellowed :

" ' That's a lie and you know it. We are debating a serious matter and you refuse to take it seriously. I appeal to the meeting against such tomfoolery.' "

" ' It's the sober truth,' retorted Shaw, much amused by the situation.

" ' It's a lie ! It's a lie ! I tell you it's a lie ! ' yelled Hyndman.

" ' Withdraw ! Withdraw ! ' bawled the comrades.

" But one man there had been present at the Bermondsey meeting, and standing on a chair testified to the accuracy of Shaw's statement. Hyndman did not re-establish comradeship with that man for months."

When asked to approve the result of my researches, Shaw strongly disapproved of it :

" All this," said he, " is absurdly wrong. Hyndman was a man of considerable personal distinction, a public school and university man, quite incapable of misbehaving himself in the way you represent.

" Nobody took the smallest interest in my academic examination of the Value Theory. It was never mentioned between me and Hyndman. I once lectured on it in a little room in the Old Kent Road to a dozen workers who were tired out after a Sunday demonstration in Hyde Park. The chairman

carried a banner ; and at the end of my lecture his head was on the table and he was fast asleep. I hardly had the heart to nudge him. When I did, he staggered to his feet and said ' Comrades : I am sure you will all agree with me when I say that we have had an intellectual treat.' And they *did* agree. There was no opposition. The subject was quite beyond them.

" The Fabians made great play with municipal socialism, which the Social-Democratic Federation denounced as Gas and Water Socialism. On that, and on our constitutionalism, we had a standing conflict in which I had some lively passages with Hyndman ; but our friendship was never broken. During his long and unsuccessful candidature in Burnley I spoke for him there several times ; and I was in the chair when his 70th birthday was celebrated by a public dinner.

" When he was a widower of 80, and very like Blake's God Almighty in Blake's *Job* illustrations, a young woman married him ; and I was convinced that he would survive us all. But he died ; and she, after a pathetic correspondence with me which I was too busy to follow up, committed suicide on the off-chance of being reunited with him in another world. They were both freethinkers.

" Clearly not a man to be written about as you have written. By the way he was not ' short, tubby, heavy-footed.' He was always a fine figure. The description of Tanner in *Man and Superman* is a pen portrait of the external Hyndman."

Naturally I had chapter and verse for everything I had written, but Shaw was unimpressed by my authorities.

While on the subject of individual descriptions in his plays, let me add that it was my firm belief, from personal observation, that Shaw was thinking of himself when he wrote of Sir Colenso Ridgeon in *The Doctor's Dilemma* that " He has the off-handed manner and the little audacities of address which a shy and sensitive man acquires in breaking himself in to intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men." But he shattered my belief : " It is a description of Sir Almroth Wright, the original of Ridgeon, not myself."

William Morris's household at Hammersmith affected different people in widely different ways. What follows is

Shaw's amendment of various points that I had culled from the works of his contemporaries :

"I never prompted Morris in public. He was never at a loss for a word except when in discussing modern art. There were some bits of modern shop journalism that bothered him as being out of his Chaucerian vocabulary or even his command of slang.

"Mrs. Morris, very picturesque in the Rossetti style, was not in the least statuesque. She was very silent ; but aloofness is the wrong word. She was certainly imposing, but quite simple. There was an extraordinary absence of vulgarity and ugliness in Morris's house and life. It taught you how much of both there is in ordinary houses.

"No : Morris may have yelled for a moment in one of his epileptic tempers, which he never let go at me ; but he did not shout, nor bawl, nor do anything *discordant*. He may have seemed bluff to people who expected him to be a deferential shopman ; but he was not ' hearty.' He was quite tolerant of vegetarianism, declaring that a hunk of bread, an onion, and a bottle of wine, made a sufficient meal for any man."

Apparently the impression I had obtained from various sources of Hubert Bland, treasurer of the Fabian Society, was a bit blurred. He was quite unlike the other leading Fabians—Webb, Wallas, Olivier and Shaw—all of whom, except Shaw, were unimpeachably respectable. "What irritated us," Shaw told me, "was that Bland, who blackballed recruits on moral grounds, was in practice an incorrigible polygamist." Continuing, Shaw clarified my view of Bland : "He was neither a giant nor a bully. I was taller by a couple of inches, with a longer reach. So was Olivier, also very strong. Wallas was a few inches taller than either of us. I guess Bland at 5 feet 10 inches. He had huge shoulders ; but he was clearly mental as well as physical. He had military tastes, but had to confine them to volunteering. He had what were then called ' imperial instincts.' But his murderous strength had taught him self-control, and his boxing practice had made him habitually cautious, as he was a bit short in the arm and had bad eyesight. J. F. Runciman, a young organist who became notable as

music critic for *The Saturday Review* under Frank Harris, and drank himself to death after involving Harris in an indefensible libel action, was a Fabian. Being north country he had no manners and was always in opposition to the committee. One day he came into the Fabian office when Bland was there, and made an offensive remark implying a doubt of Bland's solvency as treasurer. Bland knocked him down to teach him better manners. This was the only occasion known to me on which Bland allowed himself to resort to his fists in discussion."

Shaw also corrected one or two features in the portraits I was drawing of Beatrice and Sidney Webb. I had spent a day with them while writing the book; so in this case Shaw was criticising my own observation in addition to what I had learnt of their manners and habits from those who had known them in the past.

"Neither Sidney nor Beatrice," said he, "ever tasted lemonade in their lives or practised any sort of teetotalism; and Beatrice never imposed a diet on anyone except Sidney when she found out what agreed with him. Diets were to them only fads.

"Sidney was not mild-mannered, nor the reverse. Her voice was persistent but not strident.

"Neither was puritanical; neither was capable of irony. And they were always helpful, which infuriated people who thought they did not need help.

"How did the idea enter into your head that their relationship was frigid and inhuman? I used to live with them, and work with them, a good deal, and you may take it from me that you couldn't be more wrong. Though Sidney, when they were working together, could stick it out almost indefinitely, Beatrice would suddenly reach the end of her tether, jump up, throw her pen away, fling herself on her husband, and half smother him with kisses. This might happen two or three times in a morning; and after each outbreak she would return to work with new vigour and grind away like a slave until the need for a similar stimulant became imperative."

The Webbs told me that they had gone through Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* and corrected all the

technical errors. Not to be outdone in matters of precision, Shaw had sent a cable from South Africa correcting a statement in the Webbs' book on Russia ; he said that the Soviet Union occupied one-seventh, not one-sixth, of the world's surface. Sidney Webb made the necessary calculations and found that the portion of the world's surface occupied by the Soviet Union was something between one-sixth and one-seventh.

Of such was the fun of the Fabians.

SEXLESS APPEAL

"MY WIFE has detected you in three serious love-affairs," MI said to Shaw, after she and I had put in several weeks' research at the British Museum reading room.

"Then she'd better write and tell me about them," he replied : "I can't remember them."

He remembered them all right when the somewhat sketchy evidence was placed before him, with the result that he expanded, giving me some very interesting material for my chapter on "Women."

It was clear, though he did not confess it in so many words, that Mrs. Shaw had not been wildly enthusiastic over the publication of his letters to actresses : for when I wished to print one that had already appeared in a book, in which Mrs. Shaw apologised for not inviting Lillah McCarthy to their country-house for the week-end on the ground that she was "a wonderful and unsettling apparition" who had to be indulged in sparingly until she was "older and plainer," Shaw told me to omit it. "I have promised my wife to keep her out of this book as far as possible, and this is the sort of thing she dislikes," he remarked, adding, "Besides, how do *you* know? How do *I* know?" On another occasion he said that "Publication of letters about my wife is quite out of the question. She is sensitive on the subject, and must in fact be left out of the book except in respect of matters to be gathered from the Post Office directory." He even asked me to exclude a statement he had once made in print that the scene in *Man and Superman* where the hero revolts from marriage and struggles against it without any hope of escape was a poignantly sincere utterance which must have come from personal ex-

perience. There is little doubt that in the course of their married life Mrs. Shaw frequently had to put her foot down when "unsettling apparitions" took up too much of her husband's time. I have seen a letter she wrote to one of them in which the lady was told quite flatly to leave G. B. S. alone. "I could not trust him to keep you at a distance," confessed Mrs. Shaw, who went on to say that her husband was quite friendly and sympathetic with everybody, from dogs and cats to dukes and duchesses, "and none of them can imagine that his universal friendliness is not a special regard for them."

Such being the situation, although I was able to tell the story of G. B. S.'s relationship with Miss Payne-Townshend up to the time of their marriage, it did not surprise me when Shaw would not let me quote from his letters to Mrs. Patrick Campbell: "I am pledged not to allow these letters to be published until all the parties are dead and the copyright extinct. They are at present in the possession of Mrs. Campbell's daughter. Mrs. Campbell might have sold them as material objects very profitably; but she would not, though I urged her to do it."

Mrs. Campbell's memoirs, by the way, would have been more entertaining if they had been published exactly as she originally wrote them. "I met her once by accident in the hotel of a place where I was lecturing, and we dined together," Shaw said to me. "She did not report this meeting quite accurately in her book, which, before it was vetted, contained the statement 'I spent the night with Bernard Shaw.' There was, I believe, a libel on every page, or at least a passage open to misconstruction. Barrie and myself were the only people who would allow her to print their letters. Barrie wrote two special ones for the book. These were picked out by the reviewers as being more than usually sincere and spontaneous."

In running through the list of Shaw's early conquests I happened to describe Annie Besant as "one of the first" to fall in love with him. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed: "She was not the first. About the tenth, I should guess." He told

me that Jenny Patterson, who seduced him, called him "a saint"; but I fancy that when he left her for good, after her jealousy had resulted in a violent scene, she probably called him a few other things. Some of the women who were attracted by him may have felt that he was rather too much of a saint. May Morris, for example, who obviously expected that he would ask her to marry him, and who, in despair, married a fellow-socialist, Henry Halliday Sparling, instead. Not long after their marriage Shaw spent a holiday with them; but as his visit was followed by their separation, Sparling thought that Shaw had alienated May's affection while staying as a guest in their house. I heard this from a friend of Sparling's, and asked Shaw whether there was any truth in it. His reply enabled me to tell the whole story in my book, but he added something which I did not include:

"Sparling was wrong about the captivation. Nothing of the kind occurred on either side. We had both been captivated long before.

"Sparling was then a tall slim immature man, with a long thin neck on champagne bottle shoulders, and not athletic. He was brave, kind, sincere, and intellectual in his tastes and interests. Having apparently complete confidence in himself he had a quite unconscious pretentiousness which led his audiences and new acquaintances to expect more from him than he was able to give them; but he probably grew out of this.

"May's standards, formed on her father William Morris and on Rossetti, were high and difficult. She was unhappy at school, where, her aptitudes being wholly literary and artistic, she was overdriven into mathematics by the principal, Kate Wallas (Graham Wallas's sister). At home her father, passionately fond of her sister Jenny, tolerated her with a sort of remorseful tenderness. When Rossetti wanted to adopt her she was quite willing, and rather resented the refusal of Morris, who, though he had a considerable respect for Rossetti, knew that with his chloral drugging and persecution mania he was not an eligible parent.

"Morris was emphatic about the care of children. 'Who

are the best people to look after the children is a very difficult question,' he said : ' but it is quite certain that the parents are the very worst.'

" As I had enough sexual satisfaction available elsewhere I was perfectly content to leave all that to Sparling and go on platonically ; but May was not. The catastrophe followed."

A catastrophe overtook another lady admired by Shaw. This was Eleanor Marx, one of Karl's daughters, who committed suicide when she discovered that Edward Aveling, with whom she was living, had secretly married another woman. When I told Shaw a story that I had heard about himself and Eleanor Marx, he seemed to be put out for the first and only time in my personal knowledge of him. A well-known woman novelist (we will call her Mrs. K.) informed a friend of mine that she was once on the platform with Shaw and several others at a meeting of people who hoped to build a nobler and a better world. First of all Israel Zangwill delivered an incredibly tedious speech about Zionism, which led Mrs. K. to whisper to Shaw " Would it be in order to move a pogrom ? " Karl Marx's daughter followed Zangwill and made such heavy going that Shaw gave signs of weariness. To console him Mrs. K. whispered " She's got beautiful legs." After another quarter of an hour of the lady's eloquence, Shaw passed a note to Mrs. K. : " As a woman would you be good enough to persuade her to stand on her head ? " When I repeated this to Shaw, he denounced it as " an absurdity. Nobody ever saw Eleanor Marx's legs. She died long before either short skirts or Mrs. Ks were invented. I knew her very well, and the story jars on me. Her speeches never made heavy going." It is quite likely that the speaker was not Eleanor Marx and that the name had been altered while the story was in transit ; but as the incident had rather ruffled Shaw I did not care to remind him of it by obtaining the correct version, assuming that the one I had heard was incorrect and therefore " a ridiculous lie."

On the whole he did not much relish the anecdotes which I was carefully distributing throughout my Life of him. In

fact he would have preferred them to remain "anecdotes" in the strict Greek meaning of the term—"not published." I doubt if he realised that a witticism or a gesture often reveals a personality more vividly than pages of analysis, that seemingly trivial episodes give life and colour to biography; and I think he would have liked me to ignore such human details and write a treatise on "Shaw as Sociologist." One highly characteristic stroke he advised me to leave out, true though he admitted it to be, merely because it was silly. At the first night of *On The Rocks* or one of his later plays Charles Morgan, dramatic critic of *The Times*, was sitting in the stalls next to Lady Kennet of the Dene, the well-known sculptress, widow of Captain Scott of the Antarctic. She visited the author's box between the acts, and received the following message: "Tell Morgan that if he doesn't give me a good notice, I shall ask his lovely wife to run away with me—and no woman can resist me." I took his advice, not for his reason, but because the side of his character illustrated by this incident had already been sufficiently stressed in my book.

That side was the fantastic nature of his relationships with women. Mrs. Webb called him "a sprite," and there is a curious unearthly quality about his love-making in the letters he wrote to Ellen Terry, Stella Patrick Campbell and others. Naturally this unreal note is struck in his plays, wherein as a rule the women wax strong while the men wilt. Valentine in *You Never Can Tell* "reels back into a chair like a leaf before the wind" when Gloria kisses him, and is "dumb with panic"; Tanner in *Man and Superman* is "a broken man" when he realises that Ann has captured him; both of them express Shaw's own violent attractions and equally violent repulsions, his amorous inclinations and his dread of losing balance. I remember being dumbfounded by the conventional strong-man and conquered-woman ending to the film *Pygmalion*. Shaw, I felt sure, would never have allowed the Professor to bring the Flower Girl to heel in that manner. And of course I was right. When I taxed him on the subject he assured me that he had all along been careful to show that there was not an atom of sex in the Professor, and had even written a scene

for the film, omitted by the producer, making it perfectly clear that Eliza would marry Freddie.

With Shaw's inherent fastidiousness and bashfulness there went a fear which may have been due to the fact that, from the moment he could afford to dress presentably, "whenever I have been left alone in a room with a susceptible female, she has invariably thrown her arms round me and declared she adored me." A friend and I witnessed his apprehensions one morning. We were discussing economics with him when his secretary, Miss Blanche Patch, came into the room to announce the arrival of a female visitor. Shaw said that he was engaged and could not see her. Miss Patch replied that she had already explained that, but could not get rid of the girl, who had come a long way and refused to leave without seeing him : she had met G. B. S. somewhere and had been told by him that she might take a chance and call. "Well," said Shaw, "she's taken a chance at the wrong moment." Feeling a little sorry for the girl, I said "Can't she wait five minutes? We'll be leaving soon." Shaw nodded and Miss Patch went out. A smart young female in the hall, carrying an attaché case, was shown in the moment we left. While we were saying good-bye to Miss Patch at the front door of the flat, G. B. S. shot out of his room and said in a tense whisper to his secretary "Don't leave me alone!" Miss Patch hurriedly shook hands with us, and dashed back to chaperone him.

DISSENSIONS

A MAN who has spent his life in disputation is obviously not going to let his Life be written without dispute. I had many brushes with Shaw in the course of my labours. At the very outset I wanted him to put down in as few words as possible his creed. His first reaction to my request was typical : "Credo be blowed ! You are as bad as Frank Harris. I have been writing it all my life, and I haven't time to do it again." I pointed out that it was precisely because he had been writing it all his life that I should prefer to take it down in five minutes, adding that as the Apostles Creed could be chorally intoned in two minutes and the creed of his artist in *The Doctor's Dilemma* could be recited in less than one, there was no earthly reason why the Shavian creed should not be summed up on the back of a postcard. But he would not be bullied into doing it, and at last I had a brain-wave : I wrote it out for him. That did the trick. He showed me exactly what to alter, what to add and what to abstract ; and if anyone wishes to absorb his religion in tabloid form, it is to be found in my book (page 227 of the first edition).

Circumstances prevented him from dramatising a religious leader with whom he had more in common than any other of that type, and in the creation of whom he would no doubt have expressed his beliefs more clearly and briefly than elsewhere. "I certainly should like to write a play about Mahomet," he said, when I asked him why he had not done so, and whether the Elderly Gentleman in *Back to Methuselah* is right in stating that Mahomet had founded a religion without a church. "But the censorship, and the risk of being killed by some Moslem fanatic in the east, are against it. When I

introduced him in *The Black Girl*, and made him say that his wife Ayesha was a devil, I had to alter it. Islam is a religion which has mosques (places for prayer) but no priests, bishops, cardinals, vaticans, convocations, Popes, or archbishops. But the Ulemas—learned theologians who expound the Koran and are headed by the Sheik ul Islam—come to very much the same thing.”

I do not myself think that a man's beliefs are as important as his behaviour, and I was sorry that Shaw would not let me descant on his philanthropy. Lord Passfield had informed me that when they used to spend holidays abroad, in the days of their early friendship, Shaw, though often extremely hard-up, paid every penny of his way and was always most scrupulous over money. Belfort Bax had the shock of his life when, having lent Shaw 2s. 6d. so that he could get home in a taxi one rainy evening, a postal order for that sum arrived the following day. But when Shaw himself became well-off he did not expect or receive the same scrupulosity from others, though he did not let this damp his generosity. Mrs. Sidney Webb told me that his private acts of kindness were countless, for she had discovered by accident that he was in the habit of sending yearly sums to several people ; and a few of my own acquaintances admitted to me that they had been helped by him in moments of emergency. One of his magnanimous actions had resulted in tragedy. A poet, John Davidson, believed that he had a message for his age. Shaw, who had a similar belief, encouraged him to go ahead and put all his ideas into a poetic drama on a large scale. Asked how long it would take him and how much he could earn by journalism in the same period, Davidson said he could finish it in six months during which he could earn £250 at journalism. Shaw handed him £250, to be repaid out of half his royalties (if any), and told him to start. But “instead of doing what I wanted him to do,” related Shaw, “and really letting himself rip to his heart's content, he conceived himself bound for my sake to try and make the play popular. The result of this was that he made it impossible. It was not popular enough for a popular theatre ; and it was not advanced enough for a coterie theatre ;

and so nothing came of it." But something did come of it ; for when Davidson realised that he had generously thrown away his chance in vain, he drowned himself.

I wished to give some examples of Shaw's generosity, but he exploded, " Do you want to kill me with begging letters ? " and then said that if I touched on the subject at all I must phrase it in some such manner as the following : " Although like all who have any spare money to give away he cannot always refuse to put his hand in his pocket, he loathes conventional philanthropy and tears up all the usual annual appeals for charity, occasionally denouncing the English as a nation of cadgers because their hospitals have to beg their way instead of being State institutions. Philanthropists, he says, would be lost if their neighbours were not poor and sick, just as a dentist would be lost if their teeth were sound, or a lawyer if they were never in difficulties. They batten on misery and misfortune. Shaw hates misery and misfortune, sickness and poverty, and gets no satisfaction out of relieving them, being all for preventing them. Asked what was to be done with starving children, he replied ' Let the police arrest them and feed them forcibly. Bread should be as free as air.' One of his numerous printed postcards runs ' Please do not ask Mr. Bernard Shaw for money. He has not enough to help the large number of his readers who are in urgent need of it. He can write for you ; he cannot finance you.' " I did not use this because, at that point in my narrative, I was dealing with the man, not the socialist.

That Shaw was also a shrewd man of business, who got as much for his writings as he could, was proved to me one day when I was sitting with him. His secretary came in to report that an agency wished to secure the American rights of an article by him which had appeared that morning in *The Daily Herald*. " I can't imagine why they should want it," said Shaw ; " it is purely for English consumption. However, my usual terms for them are a dollar a word." Miss Patch wanted to know whether that was the least he would take. " Try £300 for the article to start with," said Shaw.

His shrewdness was constantly functioning in the theatre,

sometimes producing friction but always to good effect. When Robert Loraine made a hit in a revival of *Arms and The Man* (1919), the author thought it was more like a miss. I fancied that, as in the original production, the actors, intoxicated by the laughs, had burlesqued it, but Shaw corrected me : " The old difficulty of 1894 did not arise ; but the prolongation of the performance by the laughs did. I could not attend the first performance because I had to lecture on that evening ; and Loraine was rather hurt that I did not put off the lecture. I went on the second or third night and found Loraine starring hectically and—to my experienced eye—' under the influence,' as the Irish police say. He had brought himself up to the scratch, quite unnecessarily, by morphia, the effect of which he knew through having been wounded severely (one lung gone and a shattered knee) in the 1914-18 war. It is quite untrue that we quarrelled over this. He was furious for half an hour, say, (an actor's fury) when I mentioned it ; but we remained friends to the end. I saw him for the last time in New York, where he breakfasted with me on the ship. He was amazingly rejuvenated, Our relations were as cordial as ever."

My treatment of Shaw's opinions on Shakespeare did not pass unchallenged. Shaw had written that Macbeth's pessimistic view of life, a view to which all power-maniacs come when things are not going their way, expressed Shakespeare's considered attitude. I ridiculed the notion, asserting that Shakespeare was capable of getting into the skin of a character, just as a great actor can, without resembling that character or sharing his outlook. Shaw would not have this : " What you say is, I fear, off the mark. Thomas Tyler (see my preface to *The Dark Lady*) had as his pet subject Pessimism. He had published a translation of *Ecclesiastes* of which eight copies a year were sold. He had produced an edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to prove that the Earl of Pembroke was ' Mr. W. H.' (William Herbert) and Mistress Fitton the ' dark lady.' He talked to me endlessly of the wave of pessimism that passed over Shakespeare from *Hamlet* to its climax in *Timon of Athens*, as it later on submerged Swift and, earlier, Koheleth, the writer of *Ecclesiastes*. The subject is a very big

one ; for this Pessimism is the Determinism of the scientists of our time, which has just been finally debunked by Sir Arthur Eddington, a Quaker, in his *Philosophy of Physical Science*, which you should read. The question is the deep one of my religion and Shakespeare's ; and all your stuff about Shakespeare's objectivity, and ' Out, out, brief candle ' being a stroke of character drawing, is poppycock. I know all about ' delineation of character. ' "

" Then Shakespeare must have known more than all," was my rejoinder. I hardly thought it worth while to add that when a man has a pet theory, created by his own temperament, he makes everything fit into it. Because poor old Tyler was a pessimist, Shakespeare had to be one too. Homosexualists claim the poet as one of their brotherhood. Papists regard him as a Catholic. Shaw thinks he was agitated over social reform. And so on. We need no Tyler to tell us that Shakespeare was not exactly having the time of his life while writing *King Lear* ; but the general effect of his tragic masterpieces is not pessimistic.

On the subject of Shakespeare's religion I remarked that in *King Lear* he had put it into a phrase :

*Men must endure
Their going hence even as their coming hither :
Ripeness is all.*

which also showed that he could face the worst that life could bring him without whining.

" Why not

*As flies to wanton boys so we are to the gods,
They kill us for their sport ? "*

asked Shaw.

" Why not ? " I agreed. " Shakespeare was game for that too. In any case the words you quote are said by Gloucester, who ultimately agrees with those I have quoted."

This stymied him ; but he shook his head.

Another explosion from Shaw was caused by my reminding him of something he had once written—"I have no clue to any historical or other personage save that part of him which is also myself"—and using it to prove my point that he could not portray anyone at all vividly who differed essentially from himself. He had actually pictured Julius Cæsar as G. R. S. and attacked Shakespeare for giving us a different conception of the character.

"That," he proclaimed, "is what tyros in criticism say before they have thought out the point; which is, that every artistic creation bears the stamp of its creator. Nobody could mistake a picture by Michael Angelo for a picture by Rembrandt. All the Michael Angelo pictures proclaim the hand and character of Michael Angelo, and all the Rembrandt pictures those of Rembrandt. But who could be so absurd as to say that all the figures in the Sistine Chapel are self-portraits of Michael Angelo or all in *The Night Watch* of Rembrandt? Jaques, Hamlet, Macbeth, Timon and Coriolanus are all 'Shakespeares' just as all the portraits by Titian and Velasquez are 'Titians' and 'Velasquezes.' They speak the same unmistakable language and have the same brain at the back of them. Copperfield, Clennam and Pip have more of Dickens in them than the Artful Dodger, Captain Cuttle and Silas Wegg; but they are all authentic 'Dickenscs.' Athos, Porthos, Aramis and D'Artagnan have the same trade mark. So have Broadbent and Larry Doyle, Dick Dudgeon and Blanco Posnet. All my characters are 'Shaws.' But to say that they are all self-portraits is silly. It is what every bad critic said forty years ago. You must not let yourself be overwhelmed by my style."

I had not said that all Shaw's characters were self-portraits. I had simply implied that he could not give life to characters unlike himself; whereas Shakespeare could. Shaw took Julius and turned him into Shaw, a very much pleasanter person. Shakespeare took Julius and showed us the authentic Cæsar. Shaw did not understand the Cæsar type: Shakespeare did. Of the four Shavian characters he mentioned, Broadbent is a burlesque, Doyle, Dudgeon and Posnet are minor aspects of

Shaw ; none of them is first-rate. Of the four Shakespearean creations he mentioned, each is entirely dissimilar from the rest. To say that they are all obviously "Shakespeares" is merely to say that no one else could have created them. But each character takes us into a totally different world. It is a question of imagination, not style.

Yet Shaw had observed human beings closely, and once proved that he knew as much about their contradictory qualities as any dramatist or novelist who ever lived : " If there is one lesson that real life teaches us more insistently than another, it is that we must not infer one quality from another, or even rely on the constancy of ascertained qualities under all circumstances. It is not only that a brave and good-humoured man may be vain and fond of money ; a lovable woman greedy, sensual and mendacious ; a saint vindictive ; and a thief kindly ; but these very terms are made untrustworthy by the facts that the man who is brave enough to venture on personal combat with a prizefighter or a tiger may be abjectly afraid of ghosts, mice, women, a dentist's forceps, public opinion, cholera epidemics, and a dozen other things that many timorous mortals face resignedly enough ; the man who is stingy to miserliness with coin, and is the despair of waiters and cabmen, gives thousands (by cheque) to public institutions ; the man who eats oysters by the hundred and legs of mutton by the dozen for wagers, is in many matters temperate, moderate, and even abstemious ; and men and women alike, though they behave with the strictest conventional propriety when tempted by advances from people whom they do not happen to like, are by no means so austere with people whom they do like."

Shaw's real quarrel with Shakespeare was that in his more pessimistic works, such as *Timon* and *Troilus*, he had raged against human nature (instead of the works produced by human beings) and had in effect attacked God for not making men better. If only he had gone for people with incomes of four figures for not doing their work better, or for doing no work at all, he would have exposed abuses and left human nature to tackle them with its eyes open. So thought Shaw.

But that would also have been a quarrel with God ; for in Shaw's view men, even with incomes of four figures, are embryonic gods ; and in any case the probability is that human nature would create just as many abuses as it destroyed, especially if its eyes were opened to all the possibilities of abuse. Shaw believed that bad institutions make bad men. I replied that bad institutions are made and supported by bad men, and that capitalism represents the covetousness in human nature. "Covetousness is not the whole of human nature," he retorted : "it is only a part, like generosity, and that part vanishes only too easily when it is satisfied. Eighteen shillings a week will buy off a revolution." "But not the next revolution," was my reply. "The naturally covetous man will be satisfied with nothing less than the world ; and having got that, he'll want the sun, the moon and the stars."

Shaw's lack of imagination is quaintly illustrated in his remarks on human cruelty and suffering. He condemns blood sports, not because they give pain to the animal but because they give pleasure to the spectator, and his chief objection to flogging as a punishment is that it demoralises the flogger and those who abet or witness it, not that it hurts the person who is flogged. But the average sensitive human being who, say, is forced to watch the torture or execution of a rabbit or a man, does not worry about the souls of the sportsman, the hangman, the flogger, the inquisitioner, the firing squad, the chaplain, or the onlookers ; he puts himself in the place of the victim, feels some of his terror and his pain, and knows that, but for the grace of God, himself might have provided the sport of brutes. Again, Shaw assures us that what one person can suffer is the utmost that can be suffered on earth : "If you starve to death you experience all the starvation that ever has been or ever can be. . . . Therefore do not be oppressed by 'the frightful sum of human suffering' : there is no sum : two lean women are not twice as lean as one nor two fat women twice as fat as one. Poverty and pain are not cumulative : you must not let your spirit be crushed by the fancy that it is. If you can stand the suffering of one person you can fortify yourself with the reflection that the suffering of a

million is no worse : nobody has more than one stomach to fill nor one frame to be stretched on the rack. Do not let your mind be disabled by excessive sympathy." Now although there is enough truth in this to make it worth saying, the assertion that what one person can suffer is the utmost that can be suffered on earth by any other person is totally untrue, as anyone who gives it a moment's thought will perceive. The capacity of suffering, both mental and physical, varies enormously with each human being, like every other capacity. Shakespeare understood this, as he understood everything else.

To descend from the imagination to the style, Shaw once made an attempt to copy Shakespeare's final-period verse by re-writing the last act of *Cymbeline*. "As well as I remember, 79 of the lines are Shakespeare's," he said in handing me a copy. "Read it aloud to Colin and see whether he can spot the two authors, and if so *which he prefers*." His wish to know what my friend Colin Hurry thought of it was due to the fact that on the 20th August, 1940, he found among his papers a sonnet written by Colin, dated 30th July, 1922. "I have no recollection of ever seeing it before," he confessed to me, "though it is so good that I can hardly have forgotten it. How it escaped me I cannot imagine." Here is the sonnet, which I sent to him eighteen years before he noticed it :

G. B. S.

*Breaker of laws, yet reverent of law ;
Inhuman, yet with broad humanity ;
Mad in a world of muddled sanity,
Aloof and laughing stands George Bernard Shaw.
Now with ironic probe he pricks the raw
Beneath the broken skin of vanity ;
Now whips to life a dull profanity
To praise a beauty that it never saw.*

*The mocked is now the mocker, the despised
Curves now his lips in infinite disdain.
And yet, as if some memory compels
Old thoughts from the subconscious, undisguised*

*The eyes betray the passion and the pain
Of Jesus come again in cap and bells.**

Shakespeare was not the only subject on which Shaw and I failed to reach a compromise. In spite of overwhelming evidence he could not or would not see that Frank Harris's *Life of Oscar Wilde* was practically a work of fiction ; or rather he seemed to think that Harris's fiction was nearer the reality than anyone else's facts. " You, being young and innocent, overrated Harris at first," he said, " and when you found him out you revenged yourself by underrating him. I, an older bird, had his measure from the first, and am able to do him justice." He would not even pass my statement that Harris sometimes shouted. " Harris," said he, " never shouted and never hurried in speech. His pace was that of a funeral march. It terrified people. That was why they hated him."

I have dealt with Shaw's affection for Harris, and his inability to perceive that the Wilde book is valueless, in my biography of G. B. S. ; so I need say no more here except that I did not " revenge " myself by underrating Frank. I certainly overrated him in my youth ; but I am now conscious of nothing but gratitude to a man in whose personality and writings I find endless entertainment.

*Colin Hurry's Sonnet on Shaw was written nearly thirty years ago. Since then, as he has matured, his attitude has crystallised in the following Epitaph:

*Concerning the dead
Nothing ill should be said
So of Shaw let us say :—*

*To an age in decay
He was prophet and priest,
Providing the yeast
For the dough of our doubt ;
So puffing it out
It appeared to make bread
And we seemed to be fed.
His dream was that we
Could be equal and free
By dictator's decrees.*

G. B. S. . . . R.I.P.

November 1950

TOSH AND POPPYCOCK

KNOWING NOTHING whatever about the alleged science of Economics, but anxious to obtain Shaw's definite pronouncements on certain aspects of banking and credit which seemed to me more relevant to present-day needs than the state control advocated by socialists, I asked a friend who had made a close and prolonged study of economics to accompany me when I called on Shaw to discuss the subject in February, 1939. But much experience on the platform had made the famous Fabian a master of the art of replying to questions without answering them; of which an admirable specimen was his evasion of the query "Do you approve of violence in politics?" with "The politicians have never waited for my approval."

"Mr. Shaw," began my friend, "you appear to suggest that the poor are poor because the rich are rich."

"Or that the rich are rich because the poor are poor," fenced Shaw. "You can have it whichever way you like."

"But surely there is something more to it than that, something in the banking and financial system. For example, you must know that during the four years of the 1914-18 war the public not only lent the Government its total income, averaging two thousand million pounds a year, but lived on it at the same time."

"And a very reasonable thing to do," laughed Shaw.

Collapse of economist. When he recovered he tried again:

"You don't seem to give much attention to Banking in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide*."

"Evidently you have not read the chapter on municipal banks. Few readers get so far. It's a devilishly long book."

"Have you ever met any of the big bankers—Montagu Norman, for instance?"

"Well, no—or perhaps yes. I can say I have met Mr. Norman. I was at Chequers one week-end when Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister, and Mr. Norman happened to be there; but we only interchanged the usual how-dy-dos. I have the highest respect for him, however, because when the gold standard affair was being discussed he said that the trouble about the gold standard was that he couldn't understand it. A very sporting thing to say."

The significance of Mr. Norman's presence at Chequers did not escape the notice of my friend the economist.

"Don't bankers create money?" I bluntly asked.

"Not a penny! The whole thing's fantastic!" exclaimed Shaw, flinging out his arms. "For myself I have instructed my banker that I shall have £1500 at call. Big businesses need much more. As we have to replenish that store all the time the banker has it to play with continually, to say nothing of the deposits on which he pays a much smaller interest than he gains by lending it. He need only keep a few shillings in the pound for his customers to draw on; the rest is at his disposal as a money-lender. No need to create money under those circumstances."

My friend told me afterwards that this was no answer to my question, because the creation of money by the bankers has nothing whatever to do with their lending an uncalled balance of existing money. Shaw's belief that the banks do not create money, a belief that is not shared by our leading bankers, made it clear to my friend that further discussion would be fruitless; so he varied the theme by asking Shaw:

"Do you think there is any similarity between Hitler and Stalin?"

"Not really, though of course both Mussolini and Hitler started with extreme views."

"But Hitler seems to take the view of Professor Soddy that whatever is physically possible is financially possible."

"That's elementary. What people ought to have impressed on them is that what is physically impossible is not financially

possible. That is the answer to all schemes of expropriation. A point which I hope I made clear in the *Guide* was that an income of £5 a year does not mean that there is £100 to be seized. Hitler seems to think there is : in fact this fallacy is prevalent among capitalists and socialists alike. You can understand it in people with a stockbroker or banker mentality ; but nearly everybody suffers from the same illusion."

If only Shaw had understood the proposition as well as he appeared to understand the converse, was my friend's comment, there would have been the makings of a real economist in him. As it was, he merely showed the normal reaction of any rich man.

When next I called, Shaw wanted to know whether my friend belonged to any political party or subscribed to any economic doctrine.

"I know nothing of the matter," said I, "and the subject of economics gives me a pain in the neck ; but I believe his views are identical with those of Major Douglas."

Shaw promptly dismissed the Douglasian theories as "tosh" and "poppycock," his favourite terms when in a totalitarian frame of mind, assumed that Social Credit was a bee in my own bonnet, in spite of my assurance that I was incapable of grappling with the simplest mathematical problem, and treated me to the following discourse :

"The whole business is simply an illusion started by Major Douglas many years ago when he discovered that the bankers held a mysterious fund which seemed to be created out of nothing. Not being an economist he knew nothing of economic rent. Not being a banker he did not know what the medieval goldsmiths (the original bankers) learnt by experience : that if you kept people's money for them a few shillings in the pound was all you need keep to supply their daily needs in cash. And that you could lend the rest at higher interest than you need pay them on deposit account.

"What was worse, Douglas talked and thought of wealth, as financiers and bankers do for convenience, as credit. They are apt to forget that credit is only a word which means nothing more solid than faith in the solvency and honesty of

a borrower. Without that faith a banker will not lend you a farthing : with it he will lend you title deeds to bread and cheese and beer and bricks and mortar and clothes with which you can feed, clothe and lodge the proletariat while it works for you. But the stuff must be there, or the title deeds are useless. Their scarcity sends prices up and their plenty brings them down in spite of anything that the bankers can do. The terrible inflations in Germany and Russia after the last war showed that the bankers could not create a pennyworth of real wealth. Long before that the bank failures which occurred from time to time showed that the snag in the banking practice of keeping only a few shillings in the pound at call was that when some panic started a mad run on a bank, it broke, which it would not have done if it had any power of 'creating' wealth.

"All this is quite simple : there is really no money problem at all. Yet innocents like yourself and Douglas still believe that they can build houses with credit and ships with paper money. They actually elected a government in Alberta to do that, and presently found themselves in the position of the lady who, when notified by her banker of her overdraft, promptly drew a cheque for it and sent it to him.

"Don't spoil your book by this aberration. And bear in mind that I am not a freakish free lance, but a remarkable example of a man with a keenly legal mind, a strict professional disciplinarian, and in business scrupulously businesslike. That is why no Englishman can understand me."

I passed this on to my friend for his comments. Here they are :

"Shaw should have stuck to the theatre and not ventured over the footlights into real life. He is so conventionally minded that he thinks any convention once established is valid for ever.

"Shaw is guilty of insolence in attributing to Douglas views never held by that very practical Scots engineer. Douglas always stresses the importance of differentiating between 'real' and 'financial' credit.

"Shaw is guilty of ignorance in assuming that modern banking is a mere enlargement on the practices of the gold-

smiths. Things have moved a lot since those times, though the methods of even the earliest bankers were much more subtle than appears to our ingenuous(?) playwright. Shaw makes no reference to the cheque system, the greatest monetary invention of all times, which enables the traffic in Bank-created money to exceed that of State-created money by about one hundred times. The inverted pyramid of credit ought to appeal to this neo-mystic, but apparently he has never heard of it.

"Shaw is guilty of insincerity in his repetition of bankers' propaganda that Social Credit was tried and had failed in Alberta. What actually failed was a democratic appeal, carried as far as the Privy Council, to allow Social Credit to be tried by the people who had voted for it. At present the Albertan Social Credit Government, recently re-elected in the teeth of a campaign of vilification unique in electoral history, is the only one that can show an excess of revenue over expenditure, coincident with an improvement in the well-being of the people.

"Shaw is guilty (if a man can be guilty of a disease) of insanity, because Fabian Socialist Russia, with its record of misery and mass murder, is a projection into reality of the Shavian economic and sociological fantasy.

"Shaw should have stuck to the theatre, where illusions can be safely presented, and where, on the fall of the curtain, the playwright's victims come to life."

Knowing nothing whatever about the alleged science of economics, I have nothing to add.

COMRADE SHAW AND UNCLE JOE

“**D**ID THE Labour Party ever seek your advice on policy when they were in power ? ” I once asked Shaw.

“ I was the last person they would have dreamed of consulting,” he answered. “ Anyhow, they were none of them scientific socialists. Philip Snowden was a liberal Cobdenite ; Ramsay MacDonald became another name for Stanley Baldwin. What does it mean when a man says he’s a member of the Church of England ? He’s probably never read the Thirty-Nine Articles. And a man cannot possibly know anything about socialism unless he has read my works.”

The humbug and incompetence of the British parliament, and the utter failure of the labour leaders to do anything but talk, disgusted Shaw more and more ; and some of his enthusiasm for the Russian experiment is explained by the fact that the Bolsheviks at least tried to do things and were not afraid to confess their failures ; to prove which he told me the following :

“ The Russians knew nothing whatever of factories and machinery so they imported American efficiency engineers. In America this is really a profession. In England any superannuated artificer can set up as a consultant and sell his out-of-date notions to anyone who is fool enough to pay for them. The Americans, following the principles laid down by H. L. Gantt, drew up plans, erected factories, placed the machinery, and prepared production schedules showing that 300 tractors a week would come out of that plant. When all was ready ten thousand peasants were put in ; and not only did the 300 tractors fail to materialise but the three which did were unable to ‘ tract,’ while the machinery lay about in

ruins. The peasants of course hadn't the faintest idea that machines required oil, and when they were ordered to assemble them they looked vacantly at the various parts which they had spread out on the floor and then began to fit them in like a jigsaw puzzle. The result was so disastrous that the Soviets asked for a report from the American experts. This was written and shown to British experts, who said that it would never see the light of day. No government, they declared, would publish a document which convicted it of apparently hopeless incompetence. Yet when the report reached Moscow, within twenty-four hours ten thousand copies were in circulation and all the loud speakers were shouting for energetic reform. 'The machinery of the Proletariat must be perfect,' said the loud speakers. In no other country in the world could this have happened. Americans, Germans, Belgians and Englishmen were promptly drafted in to train the Russian workers. In England abuses and blunders are denied or concealed : in Russia they are confessed and remedied. Lenin spent most of his life after 1917 in owning up to mistakes which he could have avoided by studying Fabian propaganda as well as the Bible of Marx."

Thus, when he visited Russia, Shaw was largely in sympathy with the Bolshevik régime, and in a sense he felt himself responsible for what he saw. "I always regard myself as the real author of the Russian Revolution," he laughingly assured me ; "because I said that the best thing the soldiers could do in the 1914-18 war was to shoot their officers and go home ; and the Russians were the only soldiers who had the intelligence to take my advice."

I have described Shaw's trip to Moscow fully in my biography of him. It is there related from his own angle, much as I heard it from him. But the account given me by his fellow-traveller Lady Astor differed in some respects from his, their dissimilarity providing the biographer with one of those variations in first-hand evidence which can only be explained by momentary moods, intellectual attitudes, and the diversity of characters.

Before they started Mrs. Shaw begged Lady Astor to keep

a watchful eye on G. B. S., who was liable to wander, forgetful of his surroundings, not caring where he went. Lady Astor promised to do her best, and her guardianship had to be exercised on the journey, for at Brussels he left the party and started walking away. She dashed after him and brought him back to the fold. She found him a wonderful travelling companion, entertaining, considerate, thoughtful for everyone. Arriving in Moscow on July 21st, 1931, they received a great welcome. "They treated me as if I were Karl Marx," said Shaw, who thought the Russian people looked happy and found Stalin merry. "They received him as if he had been God," said Lady Astor, who thought the Russian people looked wretched and found Stalin grim. They were housed at the Metropole. Shaw was given a marvellous suite, the rooms of which were as large and splendid as those in Buckingham Palace; the rest of the party, Lord and Lady Astor, their son, and Lord Lothian, were accommodated in cubby holes. "We were just nobodies," Lady Astor told me: "he was the great man; but he insisted on our full recognition and participation in every ceremony; he pushed us forward and kept us well in the limelight with himself." They were taken to all the show places, to model farms, to model colonies, to everything that was model, and learnt from their guides that thus and thus was Russia being modelled.

While Shaw was speaking at a luncheon given in honour of his 75th birthday, Lady Astor noticed that his audience sat tense with fear when he criticised the Soviets, relaxing with relief when he praised them. One or two of the speakers, emboldened by his appreciation of the Russian experiment, attacked the English. Shaw said "I am Irish," and told Lady Astor to reply for England. She was more than equal to the occasion, and he roared with laughter at her sallies.

Her forthrightness could be a little disconcerting. Shaw gave me an illustration. "Now tell me honestly," she plied Litvinoff: "wouldn't you rather not have had a revolution at all?" Taking a deep breath, Litvinoff solemnly replied: "My whole life was spent in preparing for one."

But it was over a passage between herself and Joseph Stalin,

when their party was received by the dictator in the Kremlin, that Shaw's memory lapsed or Lady Astor's imagination functioned.

Stalin wanted to know how England had managed to build such a great Empire. Shaw replied that the English were buccaneers and had stolen it. Lady Astor's explanation that the English character had been formed by the Bible, which had made them crusaders, missionaries, pioneers and mighty fighters, produced an electric atmosphere, and everyone except Stalin nearly had a fit. She added that the Russians too might be great if, having smashed an idolatrous religion, they brought back the Bible.

"That is what we don't yet know," replied Stalin, while his comrades choked and the interpreter's teeth chattered. "It remains to be seen."

Then Lady Astor dropped a bomb.

"When are you going to stop Tsarist government?" she demanded.

The interpreter went as white as the wallpaper as he translated the question.

"What do you mean?" growled Stalin, unamused.

"Shooting your opponents," briskly explained Lady Astor.

The interpreter could hardly deal with this: he stammered and yammered, his features twitching with fear. When he had got it off his chest, the officials opened their mouths in stupefaction and remained for a while petrified. Stalin calmly answered:

"We are living in a state of war. When peace comes we shall stop it."

Having delivered this, the interpreter nearly expired.

The rest of the interview has been described in my book; but when I wrote out the foregoing and showed it to Shaw, his comment was: It was a solemn interview, asked for and given to Lord Astor; so we were all on our best behaviour. Nothing that we said frightened the interpreter; but Stalin's speeches terrified him—probably because he could not translate them and feared being sacked as a gross impostor. I sat next him and could see his abject failure to make a

verbatim report. A few trembling scratches were all he achieved."

I believe that Lady Astor said what is here reported, and there can be no doubt that she rattled Stalin. Reviewing my book for *Tribune*, H. G. Wells, who had discussed the Shaw-Astor visit with Stalin, wrote: "I think he (Stalin) tried to argue with her and lost his temper. She certainly annoyed him thoroughly, and his memory of her rankled."

It is clear that not even the interpreter could tell us what really happened; and he probably died soon after the interview from "natural causes."

A SHAVIAN PRODUCTION

ASSUMING THAT the earth is still numbered among the planets a century hence, *Androcles and The Lion* will be rated as Shaw's finest comedy. Such is my opinion ; acting upon which I will tell everything I can remember about the origin of the play, its first production in 1913, the man who produced it, and Shaw's part in it.

Authors are notoriously the worse judges of their own work, and Shaw was no exception to the rule. If compelled to answer, on pain of death, what he considered his main achievement as a dramatist, he would have replied *Back to Methuselah*. But it was impossible to get a decisive answer from him concerning the merits of his various works, and when I tried to make him see that *Androcles* was the best thing he had ever done he dismissed the subject with : " The play was a *pièce d'occasion* to start Granville-Barker's season at the St. James's Theatre which Lord Howard de Walden financed for him." By that time I knew more about his career as a dramatist than he did himself, so I informed him that as Barker's season had opened in the autumn of 1913 while he had begun *Androcles* at the end of 1911 it was highly improbable that he had written it for that purpose.

" How in hell d'you know that ? " he asked.

" Nothing simpler," I rejoined. " You wrote to Arthur Pinero in the first week of January, 1912, telling him that you had begun a religious sketch something like *The Sign of the Cross*, and you asked him whether he knew anyone who could play the lion well, with a practicable tail, for the Christian Martyr scene in the arena. You also informed him that there was a lot of fun in these historical subjects that had never been

adequately exploited, and boundless instruction and edification in an agreeable and amusing form."

"How did you discover that?"

"It is my business as a biographer to discover things."

"Then I suppose I must have finished the play in a few weeks."

"You had certainly finished it by the first week of April, 1912, because you read it to G. K. Chesterton in the early part of that month, informing his wife that it began by way of being a music-hall sketch, which again shows that you had not meant it for Barker's season. You described it to her as a religious harlequinade and said it was 'perfectly awful in parts,' on account of which you intended to insult and taunt G. K. C. in the hope of stirring him up to write a religious play."

"You seem to know more about it than I do. Did you write the damned thing? But now you mention it, I remember Gilbert's fruity chuckles over it. Tell me some more."

"No, it's your turn now. Archibald Henderson says that Lavinia's sensations at the approach of death were your own. Is that how you felt when you were almost drowned, the time you were bathing with Robert Loraine?"

"When you are going to be drowned you can think of nothing but how they will be puzzled at home when you don't turn up for tea, or what will happen because you haven't made your will. The romance of your religion is knocked out by the commonest facts. Lavinia found this when she was going to be eaten."

"Then it was not a personal experience?"

"It was a personal revelation, which is the same thing as a personal experience."

"Scarcely so to a biographer."

"Entirely so to a mystic."

"Oh, well! Can you remember anything else about the play?"

"All I can remember about Lavinia is that her story about the mouse, and her hand coming back, was an experience of my own."

"Factual or mystical?"

"Factual."

"Good. Anything else?"

"Use your intelligence."

"I am relying on yours."

"Then read the play."

He declined to be pumped any further, though at a later date he supplied a few more details: "When *Peter Pan* was in its first great vogue Max Beerbohm caricatured Barrie reading it to a circle of elderly people and children. The elderlies were beaming with enjoyment: the children were all asleep. I agreed, and wrote *Androcles* to show what a play for children should be like. It should never be childish; nothing offends children more than to play down to them; all the great children's books, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gulliver*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Andersen*, *Arabian Nights*, and *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, were written for adults. Like all other plays and tales it should go over the heads of the audience occasionally because this makes them feel that they are superior people with highbrow tastes. The part of Lavinia was written for Lillah McCarthy. I read the play to her and Harley-Granville Barker in the open air in Kent, where they were then living."

Having established the fact that the play was not written specially for the Barker season, but was a spontaneous effort some two years before, I was enlightened on another aspect of the original production. In the same bill with *Androcles* was *The Harlequinade*, a show "contrived" by Dion Clayton Calthrop and Granville-Barker, and the whole enterprise was financially backed by Lord Howard de Walden, a peer with poetic leanings. "Howard got very little fun out of it," Shaw told me, "as Barker completely ignored him while spending his money like water. Naturally Barker was solely concerned with running the theatre and producing the plays, and had no time for anything else; but Howard, being treated simply as a milch cow, must have been thoroughly fed-up." Only once did Shaw finance, or help to finance, a play of his own. This was when Lillah McCarthy opened a season at the Little Theatre with a capital of £1000, half being supplied by Shaw and half by Howard de Walden. *Fanny's First Play* repaid

their capital with handsome interest. But the heavy expenses of two long casts and two costly productions crippled *Androcles*; the run of which only lasted eight weeks.

Granville-Barker read the play to the assembled cast at the end of July and we rehearsed all through August. He did not read it particularly well. He was too quiet, too restrained. Shaw's plays must be read and acted flamboyantly, like Shakespeare's. The modern naturalistic method is quite unsuited to them; and Barker had practically invented the modern naturalistic method. As an actor, though very subtle and poetic, he always underplayed his parts, and his only quite successful productions were of pieces, like his own and Galsworthy's, that needed the "fourth wall" type of acting. He had made his reputation as Shakespeare's Richard II and Marlowe's Edward II, both parts primarily requiring poetic, not declamatory, qualities in the player, then as the poet Marchbanks in Shaw's *Candida*; and he was much more effective as Father Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island* than as Tanner in *Man and Superman*.

What made him so remarkable as a producer—and no one in my lifetime has come anywhere near him in this respect—was the success with which he managed to inoculate actors with his own intelligence. This was partly due to his quiet, friendly and informal manner. He never shouted, never hectoring, never lost control of himself, never exhibited "temperament," which was strange in view of the fact that his great-grandfather was an Italian physician who had changed his name from Bozzi to Granville. Whatever annoyance Barker may have felt was suggested, not articulated. He gained an actor's complete confidence, not only by treating him as a man and a brother, but by inspiring him with self-confidence. Personality is everything in such matters, and Barker's was the ideal but indescribable producer's personality. One of his chief methods, however, can be described, and it was so peculiarly his own that if another producer tried it he would be laughed at. In order to make an actor's brain function and to get him into a receptive state of mind, Barker would ask him to suggest aspects of character which were not

apparently necessary to his part in the play, and try to imagine the life-story of the man he was portraying. There was a tale going the rounds in those days that Barker had said to Dennis Eadie at some rehearsal "I want you when you enter to give the impression of a man who is steeped in Tennyson." J. M. Barrie overheard this and said to another actor "I want you when you enter to give the impression of a man who has a brother living in Greenock." Many years later I asked Barker whether this tale was true. He replied "I don't remember it happening. It sounds liker to something said by Barrie across the dinner-table—me present—in chaff." Perhaps so, but the tale sums up Barker's method, which was defined by a question he once put to an actor: "You are not, I hope, going to tell me that the man drops from the skies, ready-made, at the moment you make your first entrance."

As I only had about half a dozen lines to speak in *Androcles*, he did not think it necessary for me to suggest that I was steeped in Tacitus; but when a few weeks later he contemplated a revival of *Twelfth Night* and cast me for the part of Valentine, he took me aside at the first rehearsal, linked his arm in mine, and strolling about the stage discussed the possible readings of each sentence in my speech. "Don't you think, dear friend, that you are overlooking the character of Maria?" I wanted to know what the character of Maria had to do with the message Valentine delivers from Olivia to Orsino. "Well, let us see. You start off by saying that Olivia's handmaid has given you the message. Now her handmaid is Maria. But Maria, as you ought to know if you have read the play attentively, is a player of pranks. She may have invented the message, or perhaps Malvolio advised her what to say, or possibly Sir Toby Belch provided her with a hint or two. But it is quite on the cards, and you must not rule this out, that she gives you a hotch-potch of herself-Olivia-Malvolio-Belch. Now study the speech with those possibilities in mind, and see what you can make of it." I do not know what I might have made of it, because the revival was suddenly abandoned. Of course Barker was not such a fool as to mean that I should

convey Olivia's contribution to the message coldly, Malvolio's pompously, Maria's roguishly, and Sir Toby's with appropriate hiccups. It was simply his way of getting on familiar terms with an actor, putting him at ease, making him use his intelligence and helping him to take an interest in the play as a whole. The old-fashioned habit of handing actors typed copies of their parts, with nothing but their own lines and the cues, was no longer used by authors who could afford printed rehearsal copies to enable the actors to study the whole play and relate their parts to it : a task to which the old hands strongly objected. Everyone in the cast of *Androcles* had a copy of the printed play ; and so I knew the part of the Captain, which I understudied, long before the first night. Barker did not feel that his job as producer was finished the moment a play was launched, but would keep his actors up to the scratch by watching the show from some corner of the theatre at any time during the run and sending them little notes, such as " You are acting. Why ? " or " How serious you are getting ! " or " My dear friend ! . . . Really ! " or " Come, come ! Don't go to sleep."

His method as a producer was Shaw's, but his taste for acting was quite different. He described Shaw's plays as " Italian opera," while Shaw called Barker's low-toned acting " serious relief." Shaw produced his own plays as a rule ; but for some forgotten reason he left *Androcles* to Barker and turned up only at the last rehearsal. By that time it was not an Italian opera, but a French one : Debussy instead of Verdi. To give an example from my own part. In the last act Metellus checks Lavinia for telling Cæsar that the Christians forgive him. Barker had said that I should do it with a kind of scandalised dignity. But Shaw disagreed : " Good gracious ! you mustn't behave like an offended patrician. You must treat her as if she had committed sacrilege. Jump at her ! Fling yourself between them ! Shut her mouth ! Assault her ! " While Shaw was busy upsetting the work of weeks, I noticed Barker looking on with an air of amused but weary acquiescence, rather like a mother who is pleased to see her son enjoying himself but wishes he could do it with less noise and destruction.

Shaw's knowledge of acting, founded on Barry Sullivan, Ristori and Salvini, all superhuman stars, resembled Shakespeare's. Barker, twenty years younger, had never seen such acting as theirs. He loved Shakespeare but hated Shakespearean actors. His main object at rehearsals was to make the players think, so that they understood the play as well as their parts and were not content with merely learning their words and speaking them effectively.

When writing his *Life* I reminded Shaw of his antics at the dress rehearsal of *Androcles* and received a broadside. "You jumping idiot!" he exclaimed, using the first word of endearment that came to his mind: "what happened was that you were under-acting in the gentlemanly manner of the fashionable cup-and-saucer school then still prevalent. My method of dealing with this was to suggest an outrageously exaggerated reading of the line in question. The exaggeration was to prevent the actor from simply imitating me. The effort to comply usually got the gentlemanly novice about right. The Robertson cup-and-saucer drawing-room style was as hopeless in my plays as in Shakespeare's. Barker was not cup-and-saucer, but he was fastidious and low-toned, whereas I was blatantly declamatory, short of senseless ranting, which I could not endure. I often had to say 'Sing it: make music of it.' Barker's *Androcles* production was all right. I had only two points to alter, though I may have seemed to be knocking the whole thing to pieces. Only one of the points was of any importance."

"Then you took a devil of a time to alter those two points," I answered, "because we didn't get away from that rehearsal till about three in the morning."

"I did *not* keep you up till three in the morning," he protested. "That was Barker's way. I repeatedly remonstrated with him for it, and declared that the theatre needed a stiff Factory Act to prevent it. No producer who is really doing his work can endure more than two and a half hours at it. But G.-B., having been trained as an actor, had no consideration for actors and would waste their time and tire them out ruthlessly, gaining nothing by it. All ex-actors are like that.

They mostly hate actors. I never heard Pinero speak well of an actor."

"As I was forced to walk home to St. John's Wood after that rehearsal, while you had been taken in your car to Adelphi Terrace, my memory is more to be relied upon than yours," I said.

"It isn't," he retorted. "You didn't know my wife. It was Barker who kept you up. I was in bed by eleven."

Shaw's notion that I belonged to the cup-and-saucer school of acting was very wide of the mark. I was wholly unaware of the existence of such a school. In fact I had only just gone on the stage, attracted thereto solely by a love of Shakespeare, whose work I used to declaim in a manner that would have made Shaw beg me to tone it down. I am afraid that my unimpressive Metellus was due to my indifference to Shaw and disappointment at not being in Shakespeare. I was too much "under the influence" of Shakespeare in my twenties to appreciate the genius of *Androcles and The Lion*.

The play was produced on September 1st, 1913, with the following cast :

THE EMPEROR	Leon Quartermaine
THE CAPTAIN	Ben Webster
ANDROCLES	O. P. Heggie
THE LION	Edward Sillward
LENTULUS	Donald Calthrop
METELLUS	Hesketh Pearson
FERROVIUS	Alfred Brydone
SPINTHO	J. F. Outram
CENTURION	H. O. Nicholson
THE EDITOR	Herbert Hewetson
THE CALL BOY	Neville Gartside
SECUTOR	Allan Jeayes
RETIARIUS	J. P. Turnbull
THE MENAGERIE KEEPER	Baliol Holloway
THE SLAVE DRIVER	Ralph Hutton
MEGAERA	Clare Greet
LAVINIA	Lillah McCarthy

As a matter of historical interest, I have extracted the quintessence of the criticisms passed upon the production in the London press. It will be seen that William Archer in *The Star* was careful not to take the play too seriously, and that A. B. Walkley in *The Times* was determined not to be too serious :

"Of course it is the lion's evening. Was ever beast so fortunate? We do not mean in getting the thorn pulled out of his paw by Androcles; we mean in being the one character in the whole range of Shavian drama who never talks."
The Times

"Even while we laughed we had some qualms of conscience. . . . The noble company of martyrs spoil for us the fun of Boxing Night."
The Daily Telegraph

"Mr. Shaw has taken his duties very lightly, and the result is a very discursive and ill-knit play, which is, moreover, bound to give offence to not a few. . . . It strikes one as all very cheap: like so much of Mr. Shaw's iconoclastic performances, such effect as it has comes of the augustness of the subject and of its degradation by the use of means hardly beyond the reach of the school-boy who, coming across a picture of Cæsar, adorns the head with a bowler hat and a pipe."
The Morning Post

"An enormously clever insult thrown in the face of the British people."
The Standard

"It really will not do . . . the fable is one of Mr. Bernard Shaw's mistakes."
The Daily News and Leader

"A really bright and brilliant piece of work, not half so portentous as Mr. Shaw can be when he likes."
The Daily Chronicle

"The alternations of sheer rampagious burlesque with invocations to the Deity, references to Christ, and apparently serious discussions of the essentials of the Christian faith—these turn the fun to nastiness, and give a feeling of physical repulsion."
The Daily Express

"All that millions of our countrymen hold most sacred is sneered at."
The Daily Sketch

"The rather harsh artificiality attained by an author with the nimblest invention in the world, and no imagination. . . . As a joke Mr. Shaw's latest is hardly successful."

The Daily Graphic

"Mr. Bernard Shaw, having made game of most things, has perhaps reached even his limit in his three-part travesty."

The Daily Mirror

"The present play is not even up to the level of Cæsar and Cleopatra, by no means one of Shaw's best efforts."

The Daily Herald

"The play is a kaleidoscope of quite infantile pantomime fooling and quite brazen flippancy, with some very serious and closely thought-out reflections on the religious spirit and the 'tremendous reality' of death."

The Manchester Guardian

"Through it all peers the sardonic smile of contempt."

The Sunday Times

"He (Mr. Shaw) is an extremely busy man, as he has often told us, and has not time to spare for the enormous labour that art involves. And, after all, if a man so popular as he wants to fool and wants to preach with as little trouble as possible, why in the world should he not be allowed to do so when he does both so very cleverly?"

The Observer

"Laughter long and loud vollied and even thundered in the St. James's Theatre last night. It was not the cynical, ill-natured laugh that often marks a Shaw premiere, but merriment—glad, spontaneous and uncontrolled. . . . Clever fooling, entertaining fooling, original and daring fooling it may be, but fooling for all that. . . . *Androcles and The Lion* is one of the most entertaining plays Mr. Bernard Shaw has ever written."

The Evening Standard and St. James's Gazette

"The audience laughed like children at a pantomime—a laughter which must be quite a new tribute to Mr. Shaw, by the way."

The Evening News

"All the time we keep asking what it means, and whither it tends to go, and whether it is merely a huge cynical joke, occasionally rather above bogey, to say nothing of par."

The Westminster Gazette

"Mr. Shaw's besetting sin is, if not an absence of sincerity in his work, a prevailing suggestion of insincerity. It is over every page of his new travesty of ancient Rome, and his impudent treatment of the spirit of Christianity. . . . To expound the beauty and futility of the Christian faith, to discuss the martyr's joy and the mysteries of self-sacrifice in an atmosphere of impudent farce, is, in our view, to outrage the liberties of the theatre."

The Globe

"There is philosophy in the farce, no doubt, but it is neither very obtrusive nor very baffling ; and if you prefer to ignore the philosophy, you may simply yield yourself up to an hour-long revel of wit, humour, and comic invention."

The Star

"It must sadly be said that a good deal of Mr. Shaw's satiric humour takes deplorably crude forms. . . . Mr. Shaw, in this play, is rather like a battleship in the charge of an insane officer, discharging its guns in all directions, and quite indiscriminately."

The Pall Mall Gazette

Concerning the notice in the last-named paper, Shaw remarked when he read it : "I see no prospect of anyone (except myself) kicking the British Public into good manners. I shall peg away until the theatre is as silent as the grave."

In 1916 *Androcles and The Lion* was published with a Preface on the Prospects of Christianity, which is the best of Shaw's Prefaces and the only exegetical treatise I have ever been able to read with pleasure. It made me turn once more to the play, and I began to perceive then what I no longer doubt : that *Androcles* is the best comedy in English since Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*.

To revert to Barker. For those who thought him a born producer but not a born writer, his later career was a saddening spectacle. At about the age of forty he re-married, lapsed into luxury, and became, first a country gentleman with a hyphenated name, a part he cannot have revelled in, and next a Shakespearean 'scholar,' a performance that won him several University degrees. The thoughtful reader might have discerned the embryonic don in Barker's early plays ; for though *The Voysey Inheritance* was interesting in its time, his writing

was too finical and precious to have vitality. His essays on Shakespeare's plays contain many admirable tips for producers, but he never gives us the impression that he was in touch with the man behind the plays, or indeed that he considered the personality of the author explanatory of the plays. He had in fact a professorial attitude to Shakespeare, the attitude of one who separates the worker from his work, who sees no relationship between life and literature, which, to invert the analogy, is as absurd as seeing no relationship between death and decomposition. Like so many of his academic colleagues, he had a dread of reality except when dished up as drama or fiction. *King Lear* to him was simply a superb theatrical piece, not the culminating passion of a super-sensitive hyper-imaginative man who had fought his way up from vagabondage to flunkedom, in the course of which he had been persecuted by the city puritans, driven hither and thither by the plague ; had seen his patron imprisoned on a capital charge, faced the imminent danger not only of the ruin of his life's work but of torture and execution, and known such anguish and misery that Lear's cry was his own : " O fool, I shall go mad ! " Barker's career was not of this pattern. He was born with good luck and good looks ; he had never known the distress of mind arising from poverty, the bitterness of soul resulting from failure, the tragedy of unrequited love. I doubt if he had ever known what it was to wonder where his next meal would come from or how to raise enough money for the week's rent. He was on velvet from the start. He went on the stage at the age of fourteen, slap into a West End production, with two successful men at his back, Charles Brookfield and Charles Hawtrey. By the age of 20 he had made a success, was a leading West End actor at 23, a West End manager at 27, famous and courted by society before he was 30. At the age of 40, after perhaps a total of six years' strenuous work, he retired from an arena which Shakespeare would have thought a playground, and spent the rest of his life doing just as he liked in ease and comfort. The rough and tumble, wear and tear, strain and stress, tragedy and corroding anxiety of Shakespeare's life, were outside the comprehension of Barker,

who brought learning instead of understanding to his reading of *Timon* and *Lear*.

A relatively sheltered and wholly stable life had their inevitable effect on his nature, and in writing of Shakespeare or anyone else he avoided the human being behind the achievement, the man behind the mask. There was a strong element of fear in this, for he even went so far as to assert in public that the whipping-post should be revived for all those terrifying persons who produce reminiscences and autobiographies. Once, when I was toying with the idea of writing a book on J. M. Barrie, I requested him to favour me with his recollections of that dramatist. "Thank you for asking me—and good luck!" he answered. "But I fear I can't. All I have to say about Barrie's work I've said as carefully as possible in the preface for *The Boy David*. For the rest, d'you know I fear I don't *like* personal reminiscences. It may not be an altogether reasonable dislike: it has been driven in on me nevertheless by the fashion in which they so abound nowadays. And for long I have been pretty well resolved never to indulge in them." My comment was: "If Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the author of the books of Samuel, Plato, Boswell, Pepys, and all the playwrights and novelists who have drawn on their personal experiences, had felt as you do about it, literature would have to take a back seat among the arts, instead of being as it is the chief glory of civilisation . . ."

Self-indulgence and financial security breed sentimentality; and Barker's preface to *The Boy David*, his new last act to *The Voyage Inheritance* in 1934, and an essay he wrote on meeting the ghosts of famous men in the streets of London, made painful reading for those who remembered the producer before he degenerated into a professor.

A POSTSCRIPT

★

“Second Childhood”

SHAW CRITICISES HIS BIOGRAPHER

ALL THINGS considered Shaw bore up pretty well when he Arcad the final proofs of my Life of him. But he had several comments to make.

"You are still a bit in the 19th century in respect of arranging religion, politics, science and art in braintight compartments, mostly incompatible and exclusive," he said. "They don't exist that way at all. There is no such thing as the religious man, the political man, the scientific man, the artistic man : in human nature they are all mixed up in different proportions, and that is how they are mixed in my plays. In *St. Joan* the Bishop, the Inquisitor and the feudal baron are as religious as Joan without her peculiar delusions ; and I have brought out the fact that she was a very dangerous woman as well as a saint. Your preference for Cæsar, Joan and Charles II is due, not to their being better plays, but to their having a political and religious framework with which you are familiar and which gives you no trouble, whereas my post-Marx, post-Bergson, ultra-Shavian plays bother you ; and you turn them down as inferior when what is wrong is that they are less easy to take in."

To this I answered :

"I'm afraid you're wrong in saying that there are no such things as the religious man, the political man, the scientific man, the artistic man, and so forth, because I happen to know there are. Not only is the world dotted with doctors who are solely interested in medicine, lawyers who can talk of nothing but their cases, politicians who spend their lives lobbying and wire-pulling, business men who can think of nothing but money-making, sportsmen who do little but dream of

'winners,' clergymen who cannot be dragged from theology, and engineers who are lost when they have nothing to tinker with, but I myself am absolutely and exclusively artistic : that is, I am interested in human beings, not in doctrines and theories, in the substance, not the shadow. Shakespeare, too, was solely interested in human nature, the material for his art, and did not care a rap for religion, politics, science, philosophy, and all the rest of the rot wherewith mankind is perpetually doped. That is why I can understand Shakespeare, and you cannot. I love your religious creations because they are primarily human beings and express emotions, not creeds. In *Androcles* you really get away from polemics and write poetry ; and all great art deals with the nature of man, not the dogma of man, though of course humbug (another word for dogma) is the comic framework within which human nature reveals itself."

He let this pass, and launched another attack :

"Your contention that Shakespeare's 'brief candle' passages are all strokes of idiosyncratic character and do not indicate a phase of acute pessimism through which he passed is in flat contradiction to your book on the Bard. Why attack me for something you have said yourself?"

"I do not think, nor have I said, that Shakespeare was passing through a phase of acute pessimism when he wrote the later version of *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* and *Lear* and *The Tempest*, though he was obviously tired out when he wrote the latter. His phase of depression and pessimism is expressed in *Troilus*, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, which in consequence are very inferior works. He had come through his period of bitterness and disillusion when he reached the great tragedies ; but he was taking life more seriously than when he wrote the earlier comedies, just as you were taking it more seriously in *Man and Superman* than in *You Never Can Tell*. Compare *Lear* with *Timon* : the former is far more tragic than the latter ; but my God ! the artistic detachment in *Lear* is superhuman, whereas the vituperative qualities of *Timon* are all-too-human, and because he was allowing his feelings to run away with him during a mental breakdown his art suffered

proportionately. I repeat, therefore, that the 'brief candle' passages are very bit as much in character as Mistress Quickly's account of Falstaff's death, and what I have written in my *Life of Shakespeare* explains this and bears it out. Please be good enough to read my book ; then you will be kind enough not to misinterpret me."

He now asked me, "Is it worth while compiling an itinerary? I have been something of a globe trotter since I married a nomadic wife ; but I don't think it has left much mark on any of my plays except *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, which you don't appreciate. I could not have written it exactly as it is if I had not been in India and the Far East, though almost all my life as a playwright I have hankered after a dramatisation of the Last Judgment."

I adumbrated that an itinerary might be interesting. He went on :

"It would be wiser to say of *As Far As Thought Can Reach* that as you are neither a biologist nor a philosopher your thought does not reach so far, and that you are too old a dog to learn new tricks, or more exactly that you cannot afford to spend a couple of years reading my prefaces and digesting them. But of course I don't advise you to say this ; for between ourselves your practically complete ignoring of the prefaces makes the book more readable and not intolerably long ; and for my part I want people to read my prefaces and not read about them. But your enemies on the press (if you have any) will say that it is pretty evident that you never read my preface On Bosses (to *The Millionairess*) or you would not have repeated the silly complaint that I have collapsed into dictatorship in my old age because I have pointed out that Peter the Great, Napoleon III and Mussolini could and did build or rebuild Petrograd, Paris and modern Rome, while our Party Parliament cannot even build a bridge across the Severn, much less harness the terrible tides of the Pentland Firth and enable us to live without going underground for our horse power. They will say, if they are intelligent enough, 'This is not classical biography : it is gossip.' To this you can reply 'That is exactly what classical biography is : if you

want Shavian philosophy instead, read Shaw's works.' This will be perfectly sound in principle and effective as repartee ; but you must be prepared with it, otherwise I should not bother you about it."

"I do not say that you have collapsed into dictator-worship," I replied. "I merely say that you have been imposed upon by the dictators, that you prefer the gangsters who get things done to the imbeciles who don't. I, on the other hand, knew all along that war and slavery resulted from dictatorship, and so I hated these criminal lunatics whom you and so many others admired or half-admired."

Towards the end of the book I had written that Communism and Fascism were interchangeable terms. He took me up on this :

"As to Communism and Fascism being interchangeable terms, anyone who thinks so understands neither the one nor the other. Formerly the capitalists were all for *laissez-faire* ; the State must not touch industry : it must just police the conflict between capital and labour. Then came the Fabians, who showed that enormous economies could be effected, and privately impossible but very lucrative enterprises achieved, by State aid. The Fabian moral was that the State should own the industries. But the capitalists seized the idea and realised that if they could use the powers and money of the State without giving up their ownership of industry they could become richer than ever. And this they proceeded to do. This new policy of State-aided capitalism is Fascism. It is social organisation without Socialism, public enterprise without Communism, Hamlet without the part of Hamlet. Big British and American capitalists are now Fascist and as anti-Communist as ever ; and the defeat of Germany and her relapse into Fascism of the British-American type will throw her into the arms of the victorious Allies in a new world war to suppress Communism in Russia, unless Labour is prepared to face civil war rather than fight Russia. Fascism and Communism will then be seen plainly to be deadly rivals for the mastery of the world."

To which I returned :

"When I say that Fascism and Communism are interchangeable terms, what I mean—obviously—is that to the man in the street it doesn't matter a damn whether the State is the capitalist or the Individual backed by the State. Whatever happens he is enslaved ; and the mental slavery of Moscow and Berlin is just as intolerable to free men like myself as the spiritual slavery of Rome. Fascists, Communists and Nazis submit their minds to an Institution, and whether it is called the State or the Church matters nothing : they have committed the unforgivable sin, the sin against the light within them, the sin against the Holy Ghost. From which it follows that the struggle of the future will be a repetition of the struggle of the past. Just as our predecessors had to fight for their spiritual freedom, for the right to worship God in their own way, so our successors will have to fight for their temporal (as well as spiritual) freedom, for the right to live their own lives and speak their own thoughts ; and so the opposing creeds will not be Communism and Fascism, but Individualism and Collectivism, Independence and Subservience, Freedom and Slavery. The State was made for man, not man for the State ; but unless human beings make the State their servant, it soon becomes their master, as we have seen in the last few years. However, as some readers may not understand that in calling Fascism and Communism interchangeable terms I am speaking in terms of common sense instead of political ideology, I'll take your tip and accept your correction."

My Life of Shaw was widely and favourably reviewed, and Shaw reported to me : "It has been a good selling press. Only *The Listener* was at all ill-natured." A little later he wrote : "The book has created a sort of Shavian furore, and brought me a heap of letters from old people whom it has reminded of old contacts with me." Among the letters I received was one from a schoolmaster who had been annoyed by Shaw's answer to the request that a scene from *St. Joan* should be published in a schoolbook : "NO. I lay my eternal curse on whomsoever shall now or at any time hereafter make schoolbooks of my works and make me hated as Shakespeare is hated." My correspondent pointed out that

an educational publisher had actually included a scene from *St. Joan* in a schoolbook with Shaw's permission. I asked Shaw for an explanation. He admitted that the schoolmaster "is no doubt right about that particular scene. I seem to remember that lately there was an appeal from India for an authorisation to print some passage of mine for the use of students who could not get at my plays in my own editions. I refused at first ; but the Press convinced me that if I persisted the demand would be met by piracy which I could not afford to fight. So I had to give in. But my rule is not relaxed : school editions are still proposed both here and in America ; but they are all ruthlessly turned down."

As a consequence of the book's success I had offers for its film rights. One firm approached Shaw and me simultaneously. Shaw promptly gave them to understand that he would do everything in his power to prevent a screen version of his Life. I went down to Ayot St. Lawrence in the hope of talking him over. But he had made up his mind that no one on earth could play the part of G. B. S. except himself, that none of his living contemporaries would endure being impersonated, that there was no story to tell, and in fact that his life would be burlesqued and his teaching parodied. I intimated that his decision meant a serious loss to me.

"Your financial situation was the first thing I thought of," he replied ; "and my reason for squashing the project so promptly and violently was that I know how films always sing of Africa and golden joys to begin with, and end in leaving all the singers disappointed at best and destitute at worst. Forget the Oscar Wilde biography" (this refers to a projected film of Frank Harris's *Life of Wilde*, in which I had once tried to interest Shaw) : "it was absurd under any circumstances to make a film hero of Oscar. Take the much more apposite case of the film they wanted to make of *The Seven Pillars* with Lawrence of Arabia as its hero. It seemed to have everything in its favour, and everybody except Lawrence. A good deal of money may have been spent on it. Lawrence's death seemed to remove the last obstacle. But nothing came of it ; and Lawrence lives in fiction only as the hero of the second act

of *Too True To be Good*, which delighted him. The interlude in *The Apple Cart* does all that can be done on the stage with myself and Stella Pat Campbell : the rest is leather and prunella. All the other attempts to put Stella on the stage have been ghastly failures. Then there are all the difficulties which I have already explained.

"Now as to the money. Suppose you have a film success and receive £20,000 for the first time in your life ! That is what happens at best. Immediately you are taxed 19s. 6d. in the pound not only on the £20,000 but on your ordinary earnings as well. That is, you collect money for the war and get a commission of sixpence in the pound, which does not pay for the overhead. In short, you are a ruined man, as I am at this moment, thanks to the colossal success of *Pygmalion*. To avoid this you would have to stipulate that you should be paid nothing until you asked for it, and to run a considerable risk of its not being there when you did ask for it.

"Still, as you could draw a thousand or two every year at first, that would be a good deal better than nothing. Its possibility, though a delusion, may tempt the film speculators to buy your film rights for a lump sum too small to be taxed to extinction but quite big enough to be very useful to you. You might get several thousands ; for there is no limit to the folly of film speculators. Consequently there is nothing to prevent you getting what you can out of these people, provided you tell them that you have nothing to sell but your rights and cannot guarantee my consent or anybody else's : they must take all the risks of the project proving impracticable, as you will not return the money in any case. I don't advise you to do this : I only point out its possibility. They cannot complain if they lose their money, as they have been very fully and pointedly warned by me that I will do what I can to stop them."

Next came a request from Shaw's American publishers, Dodd Mead and Company, that I should edit one or two volumes of Shaw's letters.

"The success of your book has driven the whole trade mad," said Shaw when I told him of this offer. "They all

want a book about me, a film about me, anything about me. This will soon evaporate ; but my correspondence is a serious problem. I have written an enormous number of letters in my long lifetime, none of them unnecessary (there has never been time for that) and therefore never absolutely vapid and unreadable. That, I suppose, is why so many of them were preserved even before they had any value as autographs. But as I have never kept copies they are scattered over the earth like wrapping paper over the Malvern Beacon after a bank holiday. However, one serious attempt was made to collect them. An American named Gabriel Wells, a famous dealer in rare books to whom thousands of pounds were as sixpences, began offering fancy prices for Shaw letters, and accumulated bushels of them before he got tired of trying to persuade me to edit collectors' editions of them. He asked Ashley Dukes to make a selection ; but Ashley selected theatrical ones with Janet Achurch as the leading lady ; and I did not want to repeat the Ellen Terry success and figure as a theatrical celebrity instead of as an artist philosopher. Gabriel Wells still presumably has his mountain of letters which will be scattered again at his death, which cannot be very much more distant than my own. The copyright in them remains a part of my estate which will some day be valuable.

"But I strongly advise you to fight shy of the job, though it will be done some day by somebody. It would take as long as half a dozen biographies ; and overloaded as it would be with Wells's profits and my royalties there would not be enough money in it. I could not possibly co-operate even if I were alive : it would take all my time ; and I shall never again have any to spare for picking up my old droppings.

"I suggest that you write to Dodd Mead to say that you see no prospect of being able to undertake the work on any terms that any publisher could afford to offer you, and must leave it to some enthusiast with private means enough to do it as a labour of love."

I did as he suggested.

"And now, to change the subject," continued he, "as you have done Shakespeare and Shaw, are you not bound to do

Dickens? All the recent lives of him have been malignant utterances by devil's advocates. All his contemporary celebrities have been dead long enough. Some of them, like Queen Victoria and Disraeli, have been screened already. Anybody but Dickens will be a come down after Shakespeare and G. B. S."

I replied that I had several times meditated on Dickens as a subject. On different occasions Shaw had tried to dissuade me from writing biographies of (1) Gilbert and Sullivan, (2) himself, (3) Conan Doyle, and (4) Oscar Wilde. He now produced a positive plan of action :

"When you are through with Dickens you might consider Walter Savage Landor, whose Imaginary Conversations will show you how boring characters are which are not idiosyncratically differentiated like those of Shakespeare, Shaw, Scott and Dumas. And Leigh Hunt might be worth thinking of. They are in *Bleak House* as Boythorn and Skimpole."

Feeling that, if I welcomed these proposals, Shaw would go on to suggest that I might re-write the Dictionary of National Biography, I said no more.

DEATH OF CHARLOTTE SHAW

THE GREATER part of Shaw's last years was spent at Ayot St. Lawrence. Occasionally he visited London in order to give the servants at Ayot a holiday and to see the many people who wished to see him. On these visits the mornings were taken up with a stream of friends and acquaintances, and he scarcely had time to attend to his more urgent correspondence. The servant problem in wartime was a constant source of anxiety to his wife, who was also fighting a disease. At the end of 1942 he informed Raphael Roche that "my poor wife, bowed with *Osteitis deformans*, and suffering much pain for three years past, is *pronounced* incurable. Both of us deafish, and rather dotty!" Fortunately his own health throughout the war caused him no uneasiness. "My doctor has just overhauled me and passed me A1," he told me in '42; and age did not seem to lessen his activity. After a heavy snowfall in January that year, his secretary, Blanche Patch, found him in the garden at 5 p.m. shovelling the snow from the steps and wearing neither hat nor overcoat; and again, early in '45, she arrived from London to find him on a ladder pruning a fruit-tree. Although the gardener said that it would bear no fruit the following season, Shaw was satisfied with his efforts, telling me "I prune my trees aesthetically and have discovered that it is the correct way of pruning them horticulturally."

There was a danger that his housemaid would be called up for national service towards the close of '42, so he prepared "a battery of figures" for the authorities to prove that he was doing work of national importance. "I have brought over a million and a half dollars to London for nothing but my

signature to an agreement," he said, adding that he was losing money and working overtime to make more dollars to pay our debt to America. But his main care in the years '41-43 was the health of his wife. "I cannot stop Charlotte from worrying," he confided to me. "My skill in Christian Science is not sufficient. It would be brutal to tell her that it doesn't matter tuppence what happens to us in the few months of life that are left to us. What if we freeze or starve to death? We have had our day, and should scorn to lag superfluous. This seems to me a cheerful way of looking at things, but she would merely think I was making light of her sufferings."

In his last years Shaw developed a trick of repeating in conversation to one person the passages he had written in letters to others. In a communication of this period to Lady Astor, which she showed to me, there appears something very much like the above scrap of talk.

In the last year of her life Charlotte became very exacting, and his day's routine was largely determined by her condition. Usually he rose at eight, and having dressed went into her bedroom for a talk. After breakfast he worked until lunch, at which she joined him. Then he lay down for a nap: "She always fixes my pillows for me, or thinks she does," he told me. They had tea together, following which he went out for a walk, but "I always have to present myself a little before dinner to show her that nothing has happened to me." Over dinner, and in the drawing-room afterwards, they talked; but her memory and hearing towards the end were so bad that he had to repeat many things several times in a loud voice and tell her one day what he had told her the day before. When she had gone to bed he listened to the wireless or read until his own bedtime between ten-thirty and eleven. They were staying in their London flat during the summer of '43, and towards the end of August she began to suffer from hallucinations, saying that there were people in her bedroom and that the management should be asked to expel them. For what follows I am deeply indebted to Miss Eleanor O'Connell, who had been a close friend of Shaw's for some years and had received many of his confidences. Everything he said was

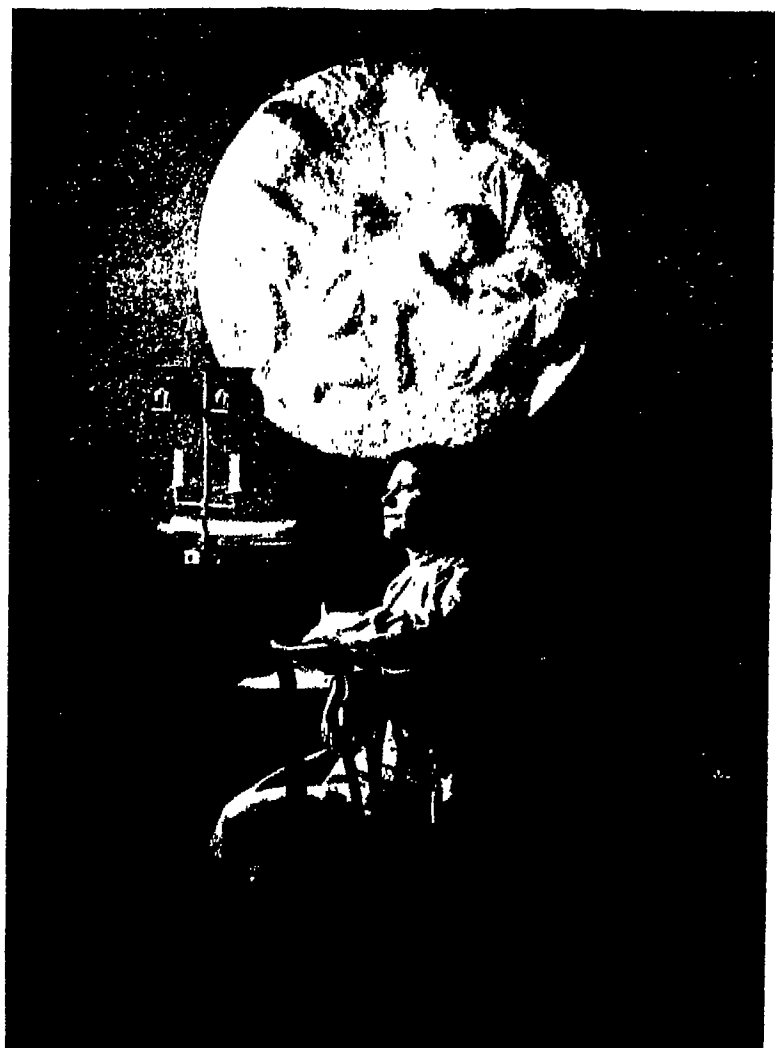
deeply impressed upon her mind, and on that of Mr. John Wardrop, who was also present, and she wrote it all out for me the same day.

G. B. S. looked his normal cheerful self, and for some time after his arrival he discussed questions of copyright with Wardrop. Breaking off suddenly, he said :

"Do you or Eleanor notice anything different about me to-day?"

"You have new shoes on," guessed Wardrop.

"Oh, no! they are at least ten years old. I have not a garment that is not quite that. . . . But I thought you might see something different about me to-day because I became a widower at 2.30 this morning." His listeners feeling too confused to speak, he continued : "On Friday I noticed a change in Charlotte ; she seemed so much happier, the wrinkles went out of her forehead, and she was not complaining. After dinner I took her, as I always do, into the drawing-room, and she suddenly said 'Where have you been? I haven't seen you for two days.' I replied that I had been with her, as usual, and she smiled, just as she did when she was young ; and, looking at her, I saw her once more as she was when I first knew her, and I told her that she was beautiful again and that her illness was leaving her. We talked together for a little while, but most of what she said was incoherent and only here and there could I make any sense of it. She then said, thinking we were at our Ayot house, that she must go upstairs and that I must take her. There are of course no stairs in our flat, but I said nothing and took her along to her room, leaving her rather earlier than usual, at which she made no protest. I was aroused early yesterday morning by the maid, who had found Charlotte lying on the floor of her bedroom with blood on her forehead. We got her back into bed. I don't think she had been long out of it, and the cut was only a slight one. I at once arranged for her to have a night nurse. All yesterday she was happy and uncomplaining, but because of her bent shoulders her lungs were compressed and her breathing was difficult, though this had been so for months. I was again struck by her returning beauty ; she was as I had never seen



MRS. BERNARD SHAW PHOTOGRAPHED BY G.B.S.
IN 1901

her before, smiling so easily, and happy because I told her she was looking young again. I talked to her for a long time, and all her little worries seemed to have gone. I don't think she knew that she was near her end ; in fact I am sure that she thought she was much better and was happy because of it. At eight o'clock this morning the nurse woke me and said, 'Your wife is dead : she died at two-thirty a.m.' I went in and looked at her lying there. Her face was just like a young girl's. You know we have a portrait of her painted when she was about twenty-two, long before I knew her, and people are always asking who it is : they can't believe it was Charlotte. But now she is just like that. I was amazed. I have never seen anything so beautiful, and I could not keep myself from going into her room again and again and talking to her. Once I thought that her eyes opened slightly while I was talking to her, and she seemed so alive that I took my microscope glass and held it to her lips : I could not believe she was dead."

He had been strangely moved by the alteration in his wife's appearance and the urge he had felt all that morning to go into her bedroom and see and speak to her ; and a little later, while still on the subject, he paused and said with a smile : " Could the world imagine the stage Shaw thinking and feeling and behaving like this ? " He stayed on for some time, and as he was on the point of leaving Eleanor O'Connell asked him whether he was not sorry now that he had no children. " Charlotte always set her face against that," he replied. " She had a feeling against children, but sometimes I have been sorry that I was not more insistent on the point. . . . I don't think I ought ever to have been married : I am not the marrying kind ; but Charlotte was interested in intellectual things, although unable to do anything herself, and in that way she helped me, and I could not have been married to any other type of woman. . . . She asked me some time ago, if she died before me, to take her ashes to Ireland and scatter them on the Three Rock Mountain ; but when the war came, and it was difficult to get to Ireland, I told her that I should keep her ashes myself and leave instructions that when

I died my own were to be mingled with hers ; and now the undertaker will keeps hers in a bronze urn until mine are added."

As they were walking across Regent's Park Shaw recalled that when he was married "a friend said that my wife had a face like a muffin, and you know that is really what she was like. She would never be photographed, and I used to tell her 'Avoid photographers if you can, but if you can't for heaven's sake smile !'" The beauty of Charlotte's face just before and after death, which had fascinated him, disappeared in twenty-four hours, and she became again as he had known her in the last years.

He had been looking forward to the cremation of his wife, having been interested in the process when his mother and sister were incinerated. "But cremation is not what it was," he reported : "you can't see the body burned : it's a very unsatisfactory ceremony these days." His secretary, Blanche Patch, and Lady Astor, were with him. First Handel's Largo was played on the organ ; then the anthem, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," towards the close of which Shaw stretched out his arms and sang the words quietly. In the car, on their way back to Whitehall Court, Lady Astor suggested that he should accompany her to Cliveden. He replied : "You ask me to come for a quiet time, and you know you will have at least thirty people there, most of them women—and after all I am now the most eligible man in England. It can't be done." The day after the cremation John Wardrop rang him up on some business and began with an apology for disturbing him. "Tut-tut !" said G. B. S., "there is no need to prolong this state. The guns have been fired, and now it's time to strike up the music."

The following paragraph appeared in the personal column of *The Times* on September 20th : "Mr. Bernard Shaw has received such a prodigious mass of letters on the occasion of his wife's death that, though he has read and values them all, any attempt to acknowledge them individually is beyond his powers. He therefore begs his friends and hers to be content with this omnibus reply, and to assure them that a very happy

ending to a very long life has left him awaiting his own turn in perfect serenity."

For about a year after his wife's death he spoke of her at intervals, and whenever he did so Eleanor O'Connell gave me the benefit of his memories :

Sep. 26, 1943. "I told Charlotte when we married that she must keep her own solicitor and bank account separately, but that I must have a marriage settlement. You see I was only earning £6 a week at that time, and I told her that if anything should happen to me I did not like to think of my mother having to beg from her. . . . Of course she did this, but very soon I was earning more than her income, so it didn't matter, and I think the marriage settlement was dissolved some time later."

Oct. 16, 1943. "Everybody tells me that I am looking well, and I can't very well say it's relief at my wife's death, but it is you know."

April 20, 1944. (At Ayot, St. Lawrence). "If you had had forty odd years of love and devotion such as I have had, you would know what freedom meant, and I am enjoying this here for the first time." "You should never have been married," said Eleanor O'Connell. "No, that's perfectly true," he replied emphatically slapping his knee.

May 18, 1944. (At Ayot). "When one has been married for over forty years there is something quite indestructible that grows up between people which has nothing to do with emotions in any way."

"Lady Astor remarked how well both Miss Patch and I were looking since Charlotte's death ; but, you know, if she had lived much longer we should have predeceased her : she completely wore us out."

Questioned whether he thought Charlotte had been happy, he answered : "No, she was always discontented, with everything in the world to make her happy, but she had the idea that happiness was always in the place she wished to be or had just left. One year we had a very lovely house at Woking. I thought it excellent from every point of view, but I knew she did not like it, and then I discovered that she could not stand

it a moment longer because the front door opened almost on to the street, with no drive and only a very small pathway leading to it."

"Just before we married she had a serious love affair with Axel Munthe in Italy, and she told me her heart was broken. I answered, 'Rubbish! your heart is certainly not broken.' And from then on she seemed to attach herself to me. At first she was inclined to belittle what I said, thinking her own views best and wisest, but in the end she nearly always had to admit that I was right. . . . It takes a long time for two people to get to know each other; and from a diary I discovered lately, and some letters which she wrote to T. E. Lawrence, I realise that there were many parts of her character that even I did not know, for she poured out her soul to Lawrence.

"If we had had children, Charlotte would certainly have quarrelled with me over them, and would have been jealous. Besides, she would never allow anything like that."

Nov. 1944. On being asked what his wife had looked like in their early days together, he said: "I remember when we went to the first Fabian Summer School she was dressed in a very masculine costume, tailor-made, with a stiff white collar; and I said, not to her but to the assembled gathering, how much I disliked the way women had of dressing like men: it detracted from their charm and made them look ridiculous. That evening she appeared in a lovely dress with a low cut chiffon bodice, through which her skin showed very attractively, and she never reverted to the masculine garb again."

STELLA AND ISADORA

SHORTLY AFTER the publication of my book on Shaw I was at Ayot St. Lawrence and had a fairly long talk with his wife. She was moving about with the help of two sticks and was obviously suffering much pain. I strongly advised her to consult Raphael Roche, who was I believed the only person who could cure her if she was curable, and when later I told Shaw what I had done he thanked me for having backed his own advice. "I want to have a long talk with you about your book," were her opening words to me. "Do you like it?" I asked. "Yes and no," she said. "Let's take the 'no' first," I suggested. It then appeared that she liked everything in the book except the chapter entitled "Women," which she thought far too outspoken, excusing herself with the confession "I am very Victorian in such matters." Beyond the statement that I was post-Victorian, I had no adequate explanation to offer, for one cannot expect a man's wife to take the same attitude as his biographer. When Shaw came in, she went out, and I gave him a brief account of what had passed. He laughed and said :

"When Stella Campbell's book was published, with quotations from my love-letters to her, I had to work overtime. Charlotte and I were staying at Stratford-on-Avon, and every post brought great bulging packets of press-cuttings, most of which quoted the less restrained passages from my letters in extenso. As a rule, to save me labour, Charlotte used to go through the press-cuttings, putting aside only those that would interest me, such as the notices of the provincial performances of my plays. But I knew she would feel thoroughly uncomfortable if she realised that the main topic of conversation through-

out Great Britain and America was my correspondence with Stella ; so when the huge bundles began to arrive, I made a point of getting hold of them first, and extracting all the pertinent comments and reviews. As the only paper she ever read was *The Times*, she remained in complete ignorance of what the whole world was discussing."

While on the subject I asked whether Mrs. Campbell had sometimes tried, like Orinthia in *The Apple Cart*, to prevent him from going home to his wife.

" Oh, yes ! "

" And did she ever succeed ? "

" The scene in *The Apple Cart* where Orinthia and Magnus roll on the floor is taken from life. Sometimes, when I got up to leave her, Stella would pin me down and do her utmost to make me late for meals. It used to be a real tussle between us until I learnt how to grip her wrists : then I became master of the situation. One of our bouts did actually end with both of us on the floor fighting like mad. . . . That woman could be an unholy terror. Once when she was fooling about during rehearsals for the *Pygmalion* revival, and trying hard to annoy me by doing the very opposite of what I had asked her to do, I told her that she was like a Belsize Park amateur actress ; at which she collapsed, to the great delight of Marion Terry, who had heard that I was a preposterous person and was on her guard against me, and I completed my conquest of her when I said that her version of one of my speeches in the play was better than the original, and that if she could remember it I'd substitute it for mine. But her memory was bad and she couldn't. . . . Stella was a monster. I remember her saying to the fellow who was playing the Colonel—what was his name ? anyhow he was a most distinguished-looking man with perfect manners, and an admirable actor—she actually said to him during a rehearsal ' Put that chair there, please, and do it as much like a gentleman as you can.' I wonder why he did not throw the chair at her head. He would have got three cheers from me if he had."

Though I felt that Mrs. Shaw would scarcely approve, I could not help making the most of the occasion by asking

whether Annie Besant had attracted him physically. "She had absolutely no sex appeal," he answered. "Did I ever tell you that she is Raina in *Arms and The Man*?"

"What about Isadora Duncan? People still insist that she was the woman who said to you, 'As you have the greatest brain in the world and I have the most beautiful body, we ought to produce the most perfect child,' although I have contradicted it on your authority."

"There's no smoke without a fire, and I dare say the incident was fathered (or mothered) on to her after a scene between us. One day I went to a party given by Lady Kennet of the Dene. Sitting alone on a sofa, clothed in draperies and appearing rather damaged, was a woman whose face looked as if it had been made of sugar and someone had licked it. This was Isadora. We were introduced. She rose, held out her arms, and cried 'I have loved you all my life. Come!' Well, I went. We sat down together on the sofa; the entire party gathered round us as if they were witnessing a play; and for an hour we performed an act of *Tristan and Isolde* for their benefit. After it was over, she begged me to call on her, when she declared that she would dance for me undraped. I gravely made a note of the appointment, but forgot to keep it."

PERAMBULATING LONDON

I MET Shaw several times during his visit to London in the summer and autumn of 1943: at Whitehall Court, at Eleanor O'Connell's house, and twice out of doors. "During the three years or more that I have spent at Ayot I have almost forgotten how to walk," he said when we met one afternoon near Fitzroy Square. "Now, back in London, I am learning to walk again." Pointing to the church on the other side of the road, he remarked, "That is where my sister Lucy was married. I remember the occasion well: the place was filled with young men, all of whom thought they were engaged to her." He told me that he was revisiting many of the spots he had known in the years before his marriage. He had just been to look at the house in which he had once lived in Osnaburg Street, and found that it was now a factory. He had also spent some minutes gazing at his old home, No. 29 Fitzroy Square. I asked him what rooms he had occupied there. "My bedroom overlooking the Square took up the whole front of the top floor. Immediately beneath it were the drawing-room and a little room at the side, also overlooking the Square, which was my study. My mother and I lived in the two top floors, but when I began to make money (about £2500 a year) I bought the whole house for my mother. Later I took No. 8 Park Village West for her, and there she died."

"Where else have you been to?"

"Oh, all over the place! I have been to see Victoria Park, where Candida lived, and to get to it I had to take a train to Shoreditch and then wait in two bus queues. The other day I walked to Wandsworth, and I have visited my old pitches at the Docks and Lambeth and Bermondsey and Clapham, and I have walked all down the Fulham Road to Putney, and had a look at Brompton Square on the way."

"Why Brompton Square?"

"Jenny Patterson lived there. I have never forgotten how an old woman next door put her head out of the window at 3 o'clock one morning as Jenny was seeing me off, and made some most objectionable comments at the top of her voice. Neither of us enjoyed the experience, and thereafter I came and went in a less conspicuous manner."

We arrived in Oxford Street, and he asked me to accompany him to Hyde Park. "I usually prefer to make these jaunts alone," he explained, "but I find your company both restful and invigorating. Why is that?" "Possibly because I am interested in human beings instead of humanity," was the only explanation that occurred to me. We bused to Marble Arch, entered the Park, walked in a westerly direction for a while, and then turned south. I noticed that at moments he was a little shaky on his legs, but the walking did not seem to tire him. We sat down by the Serpentine, and he talked about Hitler, whose *Mein Kampf* he had been reading with close attention :

"His book stands with Calvin's *Institutes*, Marx's *Capital*, and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: it is epoch-making. Of course he's mad on some points, but who isn't? The one chance for the Tory Party in this country is to adopt him as their leader. Of course we must thrash him, because of his phobias and his ruffianism; but we mustn't hang him. He can teach us a lot."

"I am sick to death of his very name," said I, "and I long for the day when I can pick up a paper and not see it. What bores the Germans are! And what bloody fools! I've been reading Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, and if, as I am told, Goethe is the greatest thing the Germans have produced, then all I can say is that anyone who thinks the idiots could ever win a war, or do anything else except bore mankind to death, had better make a careful study of Eckermann."

Shaw laughed heartily, and remarked that praise of Hitler and dispraise of Goethe was "something novel in the England of to-day."

"Do you think," I asked, "that there has been any real

progress in the world during the last thousand years or so ? ”

“ Who knows ? I don’t. Perhaps we are aware of a little more than our remote ancestors, but whether that knowledge denotes true progress is debatable. One might have said a few years ago that we were more comfortable than the aborigines of these islands, but the war makes one doubt even that. Man may have to give way to a better animal, who will do the job he has bungled. But there’s no need to despair on that account. We can put our trust in God or the Life Force or the Creative Purpose or whatever else you like to call It.”

“ Have you the slightest belief in a hereafter, or wish for it ? ”

“ In the sense you mean, neither belief nor wish. When I die, I die. I have never believed in personal survival. An eternity of G.B.S. or anyone else is unthinkable. Individuals perish, but creation goes on. I believe in Life Everlasting, not in Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson everlasting. People who imagine that they will continue for ever also imagine that they will be transformed in the next world. As this means that they will be totally unrecognisable by their worldly selves, their friends and relations, they might just as well admit bravely that they die before becoming someone else.”

Some weeks or months previously it had been announced that Russia had decided on a new national anthem. Shaw now told me that many years ago he had suggested that the second verse of the British national anthem should be scrapped, and at Elgar’s request had written a verse to take its place. He gave a comical recitation of the verse which in his opinion ought to be expunged :

*O Lord our God arise !
Scatter his enemies,
And make them fall !
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks ;
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all !*

And he followed this with a rhetorical recitation of his own emendation :

*O Lord our God arise !
All our salvation lies
In Thy great hands.
Centre his thoughts on Thee,
Let him God's captain be,
Thine to eternity,
God save the King.*

After discussing certain people we both knew, he folded his arms and for perhaps half a minute seemed lost in thought. Suddenly he spoke : " I have been too busy all my life to sit back and have a real look at myself ; but since I have had time to do so, I have come to the conclusion that I am a great man." This was said quite naturally and unassumingly, and I did not feel that it called for affirmation or otherwise. It was, for him, a patent fact, and I would not have expressed disagreement even if I had felt it.

We walked back through Green Park, and when close to my club I invited him in.

" What is your club ? "

I named it.

" You are asking me to enter the gates of hell."

" Am I ? Then it is your duty to come in and purify us."

" You are too far gone for anything short of dynamite," he replied with a chuckle, and would not be tempted.

One August day in '43 John Wardrop and I emerged from the London Library and met G. B. S. on the pavement a few yards south of it. He asked us what we were doing, and we told him we had just left the London Library. " Where is it ? My wife is a Life Member, but I have never seen it." So we asked him in and took him upstairs to the reading-room, where he sat for a while in one of the comfortable chairs. Then we showed him the list of his works in the catalogue. " I should like to scrap all those old editions," he said. We noticed that his presence caused something of a sensation among the library

members and assistants, and one of the latter nearly dropped an armful of books on catching sight of him. We accompanied him down the Duke of York's Steps as far as the Admiralty Arch. On the way I pointed out the house that Charles II had built for Nell Gwynn, which interested him, and he retailed his experiences with Rodin, a description of which had already appeared in my book. In his last years he often repeated stories that he had told me in a crisper style when I was writing his biography. Many people recognised him as we strolled along ; and one man stopped John Wardrop with the request that he should give Mr. Bernard Shaw the compliments of the Free French.

He went on tramping the streets of London until the late autumn of '43, wearing a white overcoat in the black-out. At the end of October my friend Colin Hurry ran across him in Great Queen Street, and after the usual salutations said "What brings you into these parts?"

"Necessity. I prefer Lambeth where there are no ladies and gentlemen."

"There are none here."

"I know, but they have to pretend to be."

Shaw had been busy on a summary of his life's teaching from 1939 onwards, and it appeared in 1944 under the title of *Everybody's Political What's What*. Much of it had to be re-written and written again, and in the proof which I read there were many repetitions, not only of ideas but of whole passages in almost the same words. He was helped greatly by John Wardrop, who went through the proofs repeatedly, correcting and re-correcting, until his brain reeled. Sometimes, when Wardrop deleted a passage because it appeared in another section of the book, Shaw replaced it in a different section. This game lasted for the better part of a year, and it says much for Wardrop's patience and zeal that the book managed to survive its author's failing memory. Though it shows a marked declension of vigour and humour, it was an astonishing effort for a man of his years.

A NEW ALPHABET

IN THE spring of '44 I heard from a friend that the repertory company at Tunbridge Wells were going to put on *Arms and The Man* in Basic English, and afterwards I learnt that it had been a dismal business ; so when next I saw the author I spoke angrily about it, assuming that he had encouraged the vandals.

"Keep calm, dear Hesketh," was his reply : "a flop in Tunbridge Wells will not draw the attention of the universe, and does not worry me nor matter a tuppenny damn. A flop of the original version would have been less negligible. Assuming that the acting was presentable the experiment goes to show that the story does not live in Basic but does in Bernard. I quite agree. In any case I did not encourage the vandals. But for you, I should never have known of their folly. Miss Patch licences these performances by the dozen without letting me be bothered about them. If I *had* known I should have told them they were damned fools ; but I should have let them try. Why not ? You don't suppose the play is a penny the worse, do you ? I wish I'd been there. It would have been interesting to see how a play of mine would fare as pure story without any of my tricks of dialogue. Anyhow, if Basic can kill *Arms* let it die. I have read Basic versions of pages from my works, and not noticed any of the changes !"

Later that year I read in *The Author* that Shaw was making his will, and intended to leave his property to the nation for the purpose of establishing "a fit British alphabet containing at least 42 letters, and thereby capable of noting with sufficient accuracy for recognition all the sounds of spoken English without having to use more than one letter for each sound,

which is impossible with the ancient 26-letter Phoenician alphabet at present in use." He declared that, if adopted, this would mean an unimaginable saving of time, labour and expense, and he invited various Government departments, colleges, trusts, societies and public organisations to undertake the job of inventing and propagating a new alphabet. The scheme, he said, was of enormous economic importance, and only economists should deal with it. I promptly wrote to him :

"What is happening to you? Is reason tottering on her throne, or has the heart ceased to function? I gather that it is your intention to leave your estate to be whittled away in the course of the next two or three hundred years by countless committees of spelling-reform cranks or economists. The big idea seems to be that you wish to save posterity's time. But saving time is of no significance : it is what one does with one's time that matters ; and as there is no earthly reason to assume that posterity will make a better use of its leisure than we, why fuss about it ?

"I strongly advise you to let the future deal with its own problems and put your money to immediate and urgent use. W. S. Gilbert left his property in such a way that it would eventually benefit the profession which helped him to make it. He set a good example. I know that you hate charities ; but remember your own wise remark that no one should behave as if he lived in his own private utopia. Charities are essential in this wretched civilisation, and none more so than those which the State would not dream of supporting : literary and theatrical ones. After this war the literary profession will probably suffer more than any other ; and it is your duty to help those members of it who have not been as lucky as yourself. Leave the major part of your property to the Royal Literary Fund, which helps struggling authors, and distribute the remainder among theatrical charities. Such an action on your part would be a blessing to many a fellow of whom you might have said : 'There, but for the grace of God, go I.' Recall your own poverty-stricken days : help needy human beings who are alive *now* : forget fads and abstractions : and let posterity look after itself."

About a month later I had to see him on a business matter, and he at once discharged the following :

"Hesketh, you are a born anti-Shavian : I shall never convert you. You think I should join the camp-followers and salvation-mongers of Capitalism, who try to sweep up its messes with their charities and indulgences. Well, I won't. I am neither a philanthropist nor a cadger by temperament. I don't want to be kind to the poor : I hate the poor, and am doing all I can to exterminate them. If ever you have a lump of money large enough to be of any use, and can spare it, don't give it away : find some needed job that nobody is doing and get it done. If you cannot find one, invest in the loan stock of the newest garden city, and get something for your money. Throw it into the sea rather than feed parasites and make enemies with it. Of course you cannot be a complete Gradgrind. Hard-up people who can't help themselves must have a lift occasionally. But it is better not to meet or know the lifted. If you knew them and had to deal with them personally, you would curse them and they would curse you. So give a cheque occasionally to the Royal Literary Fund, which will administer it for you without any shaming or humiliation or patronising or cursing."

"I hate poverty as much as you do," I rejoined, "as much as anyone can who has been revoltingly poor ; but I am convinced that, the greater power the State gets, the more necessary will it be to help artists. All writers worth their salt are born rebels and individualists—you, my dear communist, being one of them—and they'd see any State or institution damned in hell before they'd lift a pen to write its lying propaganda. The worst thing Dr. Johnson ever did was to write *Taxation no Tyranny*, and he knew it. No artist worth bothering about will ever be looked after by the State or get a cushy job, and therefore it is the sacred duty of anyone who cares for the Holy Spirit of man to see that such people don't starve. That's why I said that you ought to leave most of your money to the R.L.F. The lives of good writers are more important than a new alphabet for bad ones. What does it matter if those you help curse you ? You aren't giving money for love,

are you? You are giving it so that men may lead their own lives and speak their own thoughts and enrich the community by being themselves. You are giving it to save them from selling their souls. But it's no use preaching to the unconvertible."

"My dear Hesketh," returned Shaw, with the patient air of one who indulges a half-wit: "our instruction in citizenship as children was that if we did not do as we were told and obey rules made by our tyrants we should be maliciously hurt in some manner. Consequently it was our point of honour and the object of our conspiracies with other children to break the rules and do just the opposite of what we were told whenever we could without being found out. If they had only told us how and why our meals and clothes and houses and our personal safety would be impossible unless we all agreed to do certain things in the same way at the same hours, and not to do other things however tempting, we should have understood, and become intelligent Conservatives instead of romantic rebels with highwaymen for our heroes. I have had to find all that out for myself: you haven't thought about it, and are still dreaming of a rebellious, anarchic, and utterly impossible liberty and individuality. The only hope for the artist is in a society so thoroughly organised and regimented that he can always find a job by which he can feed and dress and lodge himself for, say, three hours of brainless robot labour like machine minding or driving, leaving him twice as long to write books or paint pictures or compose symphonies until he finds a market for them. Until Socialism has achieved this for him, he will remain the begging, borrowing, stealing, self-pitying parasite he is at present when he has no private means. So you just shut up, and keep your eye on me as the Always Right."

I shut up, not because he was always right, but because he was eighty-eight.

He then began talking about my *Life of Conan Doyle*, which had been published the previous autumn. In January '42 he had done his best to put me off it. "I doubt whether C. D. will bear a book," he had said, "in view of his strange lapse

into the extreme sort of Spiritualism, in which any mischievous little girl could impose on him. (It is usually a little girl. Frank Podmore, a skilled investigator of ghost stories, told me he could spot the imp before he had been ten minutes in the house.) Now the hero of a book must have either a successful end or an impressively tragic one. A pathetic one like Doyle's is impossible." He now ate his words, a most unusual operation with him: "I've just been having another look at your Life of Doyle. In spite of your material you've managed to write a first-rate book on him. I didn't think you'd got much to build on, but you've produced an interesting human being, and you've given a convincing explanation of his Spiritualism without making him look absurd, for which his fans, if they have any sense, ought to be eternally grateful."

"Sense is not a characteristic of fans," I remarked. "They are never satisfied unless one paints their pet as a god; and even if one were to produce a statue instead of a man, they would still want one to daub it all over, so that not a single feature remained recognisably human. By the way, I am told I am wrong in identifying Doyle with his creation of Dr. Watson. Some seem to think he was Sherlock Holmes to the life."

"What a libel!" Shaw exclaimed. "Sherlock was a drug addict without a single amiable trait, and Watson was a decent fellow."

I asked how he was occupying his time, and he told me that he had been studying the newest books on Pitman's Shorthand: "I wished to refresh myself by learning the latest changes. Some days I find it difficult to write—my right hand wobbles—and I want to send my articles to the papers in shorthand." His speed of authorship, he said, still averaged about fifteen hundred words a day, and he continued to give interviews, write articles, review books, and send letters to *The Times*, on military, religious, political, medical and economic subjects. "Do you know anything about these infernal Shaw societies?" he asked. "They are digging up all sorts of information about me and discovering documents which I supposed safely burnt

or torn up years ago." I replied that I was a biographer, not a mole, and that I could not endure societies, organisations, institutions of any kind, for the boosting of creeds or people. Apparently he turned on the wireless nearly every evening, and even listened to the speeches: "Most of the politicians are awful. Lloyd George was bad enough, and Churchill is no better. Someone ought to tell them that their House of Commons style, with long pauses between every word to think out what they are going to say next, is pitiful through the mike, especially when they pronounce their prepositions and conjunctions as if they were speaking oracles."

His daily round had slightly altered since the death of his wife: he got up at eight, washed, looked through his letters, read the papers over breakfast at nine, spent the morning replying to letters and seeing callers, lunched at one-fifteen, had a nap from two to three, lay on the sofa reading anything of interest in the magazines till three-thirty, went for a walk between three-thirty and five-thirty, worked from five-thirty till near seven, washed and changed into a black coat for dinner at seven-fifteen, and from eight till ten or eleven he either read or listened to the radio or did a little more work. Sometimes he could not be bothered with his letters in the morning and dealt with them over lunch, when Miss Patch would vary a rather monotonous meal, her attempts at conversation being received with grunts from G. B. S., by discussing his correspondence and getting his answers. Now and again he would take a quite disproportionate interest in letters from peculiar people, who wrote to him at great length about their domestic affairs. And, though a routinier, his habits could not always be relied on, for at least once at Ayot he started banging on his piano and singing away at the top of his voice at ten-thirty p.m., and as the piano was in the hall everybody in the house was either awakened or kept awake.

In the autumn of '44 he announced that the appeal to the Government departments, colleges, trusts, societies and what-not concerning his New Alphabet had been a complete failure, and that he had decided to empower his executors "to accumulate a fund from which they may finance any promising

scheme for providing a new phonetic alphabet capable of expressing the forty-two sounds listed by the late Henry Sweet, Oxford Reader of Phonetics, and then publishing and depositing in the leading libraries certain English classics transliterated into the said alphabet. Failing the achievement of these objects within twenty years from my death (the legal limit of accumulation) the money will go to other public purposes." So that was that, and I could no longer hope to live on grants from the Royal Literary Fund in my declining years.

PLAYWRIGHT OR PROPAGANDIST?

SHAW WAS in London again for a few weeks in the summer of '45, and I saw him several times. On Sunday, July 22nd, and the following Sunday, he came to tea at 10 Park Village West, and on both occasions took photos of those present: Eleanor O'Connell, my wife, John Wardrop and myself. He told us that he had once been awed by a Jewish rabbi, and had felt discouraged, which had surprised him. I remarked that the experience had illustrated his conceit: he was surprised that anyone could awe such a phenomenon as G.B.S., whereas the average man constantly felt awed, whenever for instance he prostrated himself before God, and the experience encouraged him because he recognised that there was something greater and mightier than himself. Shaw agreed, and added that, on looking back, it seemed to him that in his youth he had quite unconsciously frightened people. A little later he pointed to the house next door and mentioned that his mother had died there.

"Would you call your mother a good mother?" my wife asked him.

"The worst in the world."

"Would you have changed her for a better mother?"

"I would not have changed her for any other mother in existence."

"She does not seem to have been very human."

"She was fond of animals and flowers, not of human beings. If she had any bowels of affection at all, she had them for my sister Agnes, who died young and whom she called 'a Gurley' after her own family. A cat was once run over in Fitzroy Square, and a small crowd collected round it. My mother saw

what had happened through the window and emerged from Number 29 with shattering dignity, took the cat in her arms and carried it into the house, while the spectators gaped. . . . When I began to make money I allowed her £400 a year to live on and told her to have a car or a box at Covent Garden or any other luxury she liked, which I would pay for. But she refused the car and the box. . . . She became interested in Spiritualism, because she wanted to get into touch with her daughter, Agnes. Tiring of Agnes, she tried her husband, which was not successful; then Vandaleur Lee, who was really her man, with little more success. Finally she got into touch with Father John, and he lasted until she died. Talking in the garden shortly before her death, I asked her whether Father John was a definite person or some undefined spirit of her own. She replied that he was a very definite person, a Cistercian monk, who had lived 6000 years before Christ."

Shaw seemed rather concerned because a doctor had just informed him that there were brown spots on his wrists, which denoted old age. "I had not noticed them," he remarked. Like Sophocles he wanted to write a play in his ninetieth year, but he did not know what subject to choose. I suggested that, as music had been the real love of his life, he should dramatise Beethoven. "I have already dealt with him in *Love Among the Artists*," he said. "Very badly," was my comment. "Very," he agreed. "Why not make a play out of your own life? After all, you are far more interesting than any of the historical subjects you have chosen." He smiled: "All my plays are about myself . . . and my friends."

"Were you ever particularly fond of any of your friends?"

"Fondness is not the word. I liked them when I was with them, but when we separated I did not miss them."

"Then I will put it in another way: Whose company did you most enjoy?"

"My own."

I persisted, asking him which friend's company he had especially liked. He mentioned Granville-Barker, and then, on being prompted by me, added William Archer and Sidney Webb. From this I inferred that perhaps his happiest days

were those when, with Granville-Barker acting the leading parts in his plays, he had first conquered the London stage at the Court Theatre between 1904 and 1907.

My wife and I had a standing disagreement on the question of Shaw's most valuable work, she regarding his speaking and writing for Socialism as his main achievement, I considering that he should have applied the whole of his genius to the theatre. She now asked him whether he thought his propaganda or his plays were his more important gift to humanity.

"Anyone could have done the propaganda," he replied. "No one else could have written my plays. I had to write them : they were a part of me."

My wife wanted a different answer and pressed him further on the point, but received no comfort from his admission that the time he had spent on *The Intelligent Woman's Guide* might have been more profitably employed in play-writing.

"But when you get to heaven," she persevered, "which of your activities do you think God will give you most marks for?"

"If God starts giving me examination marks for any of my activities, there will be serious trouble between us," he said.

SHAW DICTATES HIS OBITUARY

I HAD been asked by the B.B.C. to record an obituary of Shaw for use when the time came, and one day I called at Whitehall Court to see him on the subject. "But, damn it, I'm not dead yet!" he exclaimed. However, he soon warmed to the theme when I showed him what I had written, and made several suggestions, one of which was "You must say that I have provided for the greatest players a modern grand repertory comparable only to that left by Shakespeare." But his only real complaint was that I had made little of his contributions to science and sociology, and at my request he dictated to me that part of his own obituary which he felt that I had neglected. On consideration I did not include it in my final draft, and so I give it here, written in the third person exactly as he imparted it to me:

"When questioned about his reputation Shaw amused himself by interjecting, 'Which reputation? I have made fifteen.' He quite seriously and emphatically claimed to be a pioneer in science, though he had never worked in a laboratory, and contemptuously dismissed laboratory experiments as 'put-up jobs.' His laboratory, he said, was 'the wide world, in which I can control nothing except to a very limited extent my own mind.' He classed politics as a science, and denounced popular democracy as the government of everybody by anybody, the government of the ignorant by vulgarly ambitious adventurers foolish enough to imagine that government is a voluptuously omnipotent sinecure, civilisation having always to be rescued from the messes they make by military geniuses. Genuine practicable democracy, he contended, meant government in the general interest by rulers chosen from panels of

the five per cent or so of tested qualified rulers. The assumption underlying Adult Suffrage that at the age of twenty-one everybody becomes infinitely wise politically, and that the voice of the people is the voice of God, he regarded exactly as Coriolanus does in Shakespeare's most mature chronicle play. What democracy needs, he declared, is a scientific anthropometrical test. Finally, to secure genuine democracy by proportional representation of men and women, he invented and advocated the Coupled Vote, obliging the elector to vote, not for a single representative but for a woman as well as a man, thus securing the presence of men and women in equal numbers on all elected authorities. But he would not admit that any electoral reform could secure good government unless and until the span of human life was extended sufficiently to make political maturity possible, and this he estimated at three hundred years, allowing a century for non-adult scholarship, another for practical administration, and a third for oracular voteless senatorship. In *Back to Methuselah* he placed no limit to human life except the statistically certain fatal accident which must occur to everyone sooner or later.

"In this apparent extravagance he claimed to be a scientific biologist, or, as he sometimes called himself, a metabiologist. Official biology in his day was completely dominated by the Mechanists and neo-Darwinists; and he fought them tooth and nail as a creative neo-vitalist evolutionist, taunting them with their failure to account for the difference between a live body and a dead one, and postulating a creative Life Force or Evolutionary Appetite, proceeding experimentally by trial and error, with mankind as its most elaborate instrument. There is consequently no problem of evil: the evils we suffer are the mistakes of the experimenting Life Force, which aims always at increased power and deeper knowledge. He did not disparage the Baconian observation of facts, but insisted that anyone (any fool, as he put it) can observe, but only the gifted few can rationalise their observations, a criticism which culminated in his attack on Pavlov, then at the height of his reputation, dismissing him as an intellectual blunderer and moral imbecile. He steadily denounced the claims of the

laboratory researchers to be exempt from moral law in their pursuit of scientific knowledge. As he put it, 'to boil your mother merely to find out at what temperature she would die would be an addition to knowledge; but people who forget that there are things that no man ought to know are better dead.' Inhuman experiments by inhuman persons moved him to abhorrence. He maintained that humane experiments could always be devised by scientific workers who were not too lazy, callous, or stupid for high science. Popular and official Darwinism he discounted as nine-tenths nothing but anti-clerical reaction against the Bible.

"It is not possible to summarise the controversy in an obituary notice, nor is it now necessary, as it has on the whole gone Shaw's way, and metabiology has come to its own again. The Russian political experiment begun in 1917 has tried crude catastrophic Socialism only to be forced back by inexorable facts into the Fabian methods prescribed by Shaw and Webb. Many of his Shavian suggestions that seemed subversively revolutionary or fantastic when he first put them forward are now commonplaces, though the old view of their author still persists long after its basis has dissolved. In any case they interest and are understood by few, whereas there is a relatively enormous publicity for his exploits as a playwright. How he will stand in future centuries cannot be foreseen. He himself was fond of saying that reputations that are not for an age but for all time mean world stagnation, and that the sooner he is forgotten the better. It remains to be seen whether the memory of the man who survived five reigns will survive fifty."

Having completed the obituary I forwarded it to G.B.S., then at Ayot St. Lawrence. He kept it for several weeks, and when I demanded its return he sent it back with so many corrections and additions that I rebelled, and recorded my own version.

PILGRIMS AT AYOT

IN THE autumn on 1945 I was writing a book with my friend Hugh Kingsmill, and it occurred to us that we might include in it an account of a visit to Shaw ; so I wrote to say we would like to see him. One of his little peculiarities was a pretence that he could only spare time to see people on business ; but I knew that was nonsense, and when he did not reply within three or four days I sent him a wire which ran : "What the hell ! Unless you forward doctor's certificate, expect us on Monday." Immediately on receipt of this he rang me up to say he was expecting us, and on November 5th we motored down to Ayot. On the way I recalled that the last time I was there Shaw told me that he had once made a speech in his native town of Dublin. "I addressed the Gaelic League," he said, "and annoyed them very much by claiming that I wrote in a language understood by at least three hundred million people in preference to one that could be read by at most three million. I was subjected to a good deal of heckling, and there were attempts to shout me down. I stood it for a time, but at last determined that either I or the noise must stop. So I warned them : 'If you won't listen to me quietly, I'll make the rest of my speech in Gaelic, and not one of you will understand a syllable of it.' They were not so foolish as they behaved. At once the calm of death descended upon them, and I finished the speech, not in their mother-tongue, but in the tongue of their mothers."

Hugh Kingsmill was impressed by the rustic seclusion of Ayot, saying that Gray's Country Churchyard was Piccadilly Circus compared with Shaw's retreat. On our arrival we were shown into the drawing-room, from the window of which we

could see G.B.S. nodding drowsily in a chair in the dining-room. He joined us after a minute or two, and to my conventional "How are you?" said "Ninety." "Yes, but how are you feeling?" "Well, how does anyone feel at ninety? You'll know when you get there. I'm all right here at home, but it's troublesome in London; and if I fell down there, I might be picked up by a policeman and run in for being drunk."

In the course of our conversation, which was faithfully recorded by Kingsmill and myself in *Talking of Dick Whittington* (1947), Shaw spoke of Dickens, Edmund Yates and H. G. Wells:

(Of Dickens.) "The truth is, he'd a very large and stupid family, and he had to earn all that money for them, and kept himself going with brandy and other poisons. He was really dead before *Edwin Drood*. Sapsea and Grewgious repeat all the old tricks, but the fire has gone out of them. That reminds me of a farce of mine. I had to secure the copyright of *Cashel Byron's Profession*, and wrote *The Admirable Bashville* for the purpose, and the Stage Society produced it. I wanted a burlesque actor, and at last I found the man. His name was Wyse. He seemed to have all the tricks at his finger-tips, but at the very first rehearsal I discovered that the lines which I had thought so funny weren't funny at all. I asked Ben Webster what was the matter with Wyse, and he replied 'Oh, he'll be all right on the night.' But he was *not* all right on the night. All the tricks were there, but they weren't amusing. The audience laughed at the lines, because they could hear them, but not at the way they were said. The next day Wyse lay down on a sofa and died, and I realised that he had been dead before the rehearsal. Well, the point of all this rigmarole is that people die before they're ready for burial, and Dickens was dead before *Edwin Drood*."

(Of Edmund Yates.) "No one liked him. He was a bully. I had to write for him on fiction at fivepence a line, and I got very tired of it, and of having to sign myself F.B.—you know, Fred Bayham, a character in Thackeray's *Newcomes*. I aired my gricvances, and received a letter from his secretary begin-

ning ' Mr. Yates requests me to inform you that . . . ' Well, there's only one possible answer to an opening like that, and I began my letter ' I have yet to learn . . . ' Things got better after that, and when Yates was dying I used to write to him to cheer him up. But I found out later that his family hadn't dared to read him my letters, for it seems he was frightened of me."

(Of H. G. Wells.) " No one could be angry with Wells for long. He frankly admits that his temper is hysterical. I remember meeting him the day after the appearance of an outrageous article which he had written on me. Really, I'd have been entitled to punch his head. But he was looking small and uneasy, and I just shook hands with him. Another time, when he was very angry with me, he wrote to me that everyone believed me to be homosexual, and that he, Wells, had always denied it, but that in future he wouldn't. Incidentally, I have just written an obituary of him for *The New Statesman* ; but please keep that to yourselves."

Wells did not die till the following August, when Shaw's nine-months old tribute duly appeared.

Two hours were passed in pleasant talk, during which we had tea, and when we got up to go we both said that it had been delightful to see him. " And why wouldn't it be ? " he replied.

THREE SCORE YEARS AND THIRTY

THE YEAR 1946 saw Shaw's ninetieth birthday, but the Labour Government made no gesture of recognition. As the Webbs and he had done more than anyone to found the parliamentary Labour Party, its quiescence on this occasion may seem curious. But against the fact that a British Government is perhaps the only government in the world that would have passed such an event unnoticed, we must remember that no other government in the world would have had the chance to celebrate it. Long before his seventieth year his fate in other countries would have been decided. In France he would almost certainly have been assassinated ; in the United States, if the treatment of Eugene Debs is anything to go by, he would have been gaoled for life ; in Russia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Japan he would have been "liquidated." That he was tolerated and unmolested in England proves, what in his better moments he used to admit, that we are the only civilised, or rather semi-civilised, great power in the world.

But the year did not pass by without some public acknowledgment of his eminence. The leading newspapers of every country published tributes. The National Book League held an exhibition at 7 Albemarle Street of Shawian first editions, manuscripts, photos, etc., and Shaw motored up from the country to see it on the first day, July 19th. He arrived some time after the opening speech by Dr. Inge, glanced at the exhibits, said "Well, ladies and gentlemen, you have seen the animal : good-bye," and motored back to Ayot. He accepted the invitation to become an Honorary Freeman of Dublin, stating that he had hitherto evaded credentials from foreign sources, and "Dublin alone has the right to affirm that in

spite of my incessantly controversial past and present I have not disgraced her." Delegates from the Corporation went to Ayot, and he signed the roll of Honorary Freemen on August 28th. He also accepted the offer of St. Pancras, on the vestry and council of which he had served nearly fifty years before, to become its first Honorary Freeman. The cistern at his country house had to be renewed, so he came up to his London flat for a week, intending to be present at the ceremony in St. Pancras Town Hall on October 9th. But the day before it took place he fell from his chair, hurt his hip, and had to lie on the floor for a while to recover from the shock. His doctor, his osteopath and X-rays discovered no harm, but he was compelled to rest, as it hurt him to put any weight on his left leg. Unable to go to St. Pancras he recorded a speech, which was broadcast in the council chamber. "I tumble down about three times a week quite regularly," he confessed, but he did not add that his present tumble was rather more painful than his usual ones.

On the evening of October 10th my wife and I called to see him. Whitehall Court had been buzzing with reporters, two of whom had taken a flashlight photo of him, but the excitement was now subsiding, and we enjoyed a tranquil talk. He was lying in bed, looking better than I had seen him for years ; his complexion was rosy, like that of a child ; he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the effects of his accident ; and he talked with vigour, though the lower set of his dentures was on the table beside him. The crutches with which he had hobbled about during his breakdown in 1898 had been discovered, and were propped against the wall by his bed. The object of my visit was to find out all he could tell me about Keir Hardie, a film of whose life I had been asked to write ; but before we left we had heard his views, not only on Hardie, but on Sir Edward Grey, Ramsay MacDonald, Napoleon, Wellington, Field-Marshal Montgomery, T. E. Lawrence and Tom Paine. The English, he said, were a nation of amateurs, not professionals : their generals, like their authors, were amateurs. "Which explains why we have always won our wars and have produced the greatest literature

in the world," I remarked. Giving him no time to reply, I asked him what Montgomery had talked about when they met. "I did all the talking," Shaw said. "He wanted to know what I thought of English generalship. I answered that there was no such thing as English generalship. There was Haig, and there was Montgomery. Then I told him that there were two kinds of general: those who followed the rules, and those who broke them, the professional and the amateur, Napoleon and Wellington. Montgomery hinted that he, like Wellington, made his own rules as he went along. He said that he wanted to see war abolished."

"Rather ungrateful of him," I commented. "Like a writer who, having made his reputation as an author, wants to see writing abolished. Is Montgomery at all like T. E. Lawrence?"

"Not in the least. Lawrence was a pure undiluted actor. A few weeks before his death I asked my wife, who was an intimate friend of his, why we had not seen him for some time. 'Oh,' said she, 'he's such an infernal liar!'"

I was amused by Shaw's complete silence on the subject of my *Life of Oscar Wilde*, which had been published the previous June. He had shown much interest in my biographies in the past, writing or talking to me at some length about them; but on at least three occasions he had done his utmost to dissuade me from tackling Wilde, partly because he had committed himself to an approval of Frank Harris's entirely untrustworthy record, and partly because he really disliked Wilde; of whom, I believe, he was also jealous, because the only time I noticed real hostility towards a fellow-being in Shaw's manner and speech was when we were discussing his famous fellow-countryman. I sent him a copy of my book, but I doubt whether he did more than peck at it. His silence therefore did not surprise me, for he had said so much in praise of Harris's book that he would have had to eat more words than any mortal could be expected to digest, and he never had a good appetite in that respect.

His dislike of Wilde made him absent-minded. He left it on record that they were uncomfortable in their personal relationship, though they had taken one another seriously as

writers ; that when Wilde was sentenced to prison he had drafted a petition for his release ; and that during Wilde's last phase each of them had sent inscribed copies of his books to the other. But Shaw never confessed that when he was a relative nobody he had sent Wilde, then famous, his *Quintessence of Ibsenism* and *Widowers' Houses*, and that Wilde had written him most appreciative and encouraging letters about both, acknowledging the play on May 9th, 1893, in these terms : " I must thank you very sincerely for Op. 2 of the great Celtic School. . . . I look forward to your Op. 4—as for Op. 5 I am lazy, but am rather itching to be at it." Op. 1 was obviously *Lady Windermere's Fan* ; Op. 2 *Widowers' Houses* ; Op. 3 *A Woman of No Importance*, then running at the Haymarket Theatre ; Op. 4, Shaw's next play, *The Philanderer* ; Op. 5, Wilde's next play, *An Ideal Husband*. And so on. Wilde thus paid Shaw the compliment of ranking their works together in the dramatic literature of the age, though he had just scored his second huge success with *A Woman of No Importance*, while Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* had practically been hooted from the stage the previous December.

It is worth mentioning that I noticed a rather glassy look in Shaw's eye when next we met, which I attributed to his disapproval of my having ignored his advice and done my best to rescue Wilde from Harris and recreate him as the fascinating fellow he undoubtedly was. But Shaw was not the man to maintain an attitude from which he could derive no credit, and the enormous revival of interest in Wilde's work and personality produced one of those quick-changes which surprised so many of the sage's more slow-witted admirers. In February, 1948, the *News Chronicle* asked Shaw what famous man of the past he would like to meet, and he replied : " If I craved for entertaining conversation by a first-class raconteur I should choose Oscar Wilde."

In spite of occasional tumbles, Shaw maintained his usual good health all through 1946, though on Sunday, August 25th, he described a strange physical sensation to Eleanor O'Connell, who had gone down to see him at Ayot. The moment he entered the drawing-room, he asked : " How do I look ? "

"Very well."

"No, seriously, how do I look?"

"Why?"

"Because I am going to die."

"Don't be absurd! You look as well as ever."

"Well, when I got up this morning I felt extremely queer. I've never felt quite like that before, and I'm sure I'm going to die."

"How do you feel now?"

"Not so bad, but still rather queer."

"Then you're all right. On the day you're going to die you'll get up feeling like a boy of ten."

A few days later his one-time friend and associate, Harley Granville-Barker, died in Paris. "The shock the news gave me," he wrote to *The Times Literary Supplement*, "made me realise how I had still cherished a hope that our old intimate relation might revive. But

Marriage and death and division

Make barren our lives . . ."

A BARDIC BATTLE

AS LIVELY as usual, and as totalitarian in temperament as he had ever been, G.B.S. had a final skirmish with me. Inevitably the subject of our disagreement was Shakespeare ; and as so much of Shaw's character was revealed in the course of the argument, I cannot do better than record our exchanges.

In the spring of '42 I had sent him a copy of my *Life of Shakespeare*, published by Penguin Books, and though he had expressed his general approval of it he had raised several interesting queries which I had promptly answered. At the end of '46 I wanted to get the book published in a more durable form, and it struck me that our argument was interesting enough to be printed as an appendix to the new edition. So I showed him an exact record of our debate, which he now read (November, 1946) some four and a half years after it had taken place :

G. B. S. Well, you have made a good job of it, which is more than I can say for the older biographies. I am specially pleased with your disposal of the horse-holding tradition, which in its old form was incredible by anyone who got Shakespeare's class exactly. But that he got a foothold in the theatre by organising the horse boys and making money out of it is just what would have happened to a man who had picked up some business experience with his father whilst the other dramatic poets were disqualifying themselves as scholars at the universities. Actors are so un-businesslike that if one of them can keep a cash book he gets shoved into management willy nilly. For instance, C. B. Cochran and Barry Jackson, both of whom wanted to act, not to manage.

- H. P. All the same the greatest actor since Burbage was a first-rate man of business : David Garrick.
- G. B. S. A descendant of French Huguenots ought to know his way about a ledger. Besides, he started life in the wine trade, didn't he ? He probably held a monopoly of the drinks sold in Drury Lane Theatre, just as Shakespeare kept up his horse-holding business after becoming an actor.
- H. P. If I write a Life of David Garrick I'll let you know.
- G. B. S. If you revise your work there are one or two points which you should reconsider. Marlowe was not Shakespeare's rival : he was established before Shakespeare arrived, and was the champion whom Shakespeare challenged. Thus Shakespeare was Marlowe's rival, and could sling "mighty lines" about so easily that in *Richard III*, for instance, it is impossible to say which of them wrote "So now prosperity begins to mellow, and drop into the rotten jaws of death." Marlowe might have written that, though Shakespeare could never have written such nonsense as "the gaudy blabbing and remorseful day." The proud-sailing rival was Chapman, who flaunted his scholarship very proudly—stage directions all in Latin : not merely *exit* and *exeunt omnes*, which anybody could pick up. Tyler made this identification ; and I see no reason to question it. Chapman was the only genius thundering enough to alarm Shakespeare as a new business rival.
- H. P. I cannot believe that Shakespeare ever regarded Chapman as a serious rival. Chapman is dull and pedantic, the very opposite of Shakespeare, whose enormous success in his prime must have put him beyond fear of any rival. Marlowe, on the other hand, overshadowed Shakespeare's youth ; they were born in the same year, and Marlowe's unique position and resounding success must have had a permanent effect on an ambitious and supersensitive fellow like Shakespeare. I am sure that, until he had written his great tragedies, Shakespeare always felt conscious of Marlowe's potential superiority. Don't forget that Marlowe, cut off in his prime, left a memory of

greatness which his actual performance did not justify. I think Shakespeare had Marlowe on his mind until he got *Hamlet* off his chest.

G. B. S. Talking of that, the context in which you quote Polonius's blessing shows that you don't know that it, like Gonzalo's Utopia, is a straight lift out of Montaigne.

H. P. On the contrary, I mention that *Hamlet* shows how Shakespeare had profited from Montaigne's outlook on life. An author often quotes another's words when they express what he feels, but you can hardly expect a character in a play to preface his remarks with "As Montaigne observes . . ."

G. B. S. That raises another point. No doubt Shakespeare was a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles from real life ; but, like Frank Harris, you make far too much of this and far too little of his susceptibility to literary suggestion, never even mentioning the astonishing fact that the only play he did not get out of a book was *The Merry Wives*.

H. P. That certainly is an omission. It is one more proof, and a conclusive one, that the play had to be written in haste at the command of the Queen. But I think I have said quite a lot about Shakespeare's book-learning, though I have not bothered the reader with the origins of all his plots, my work being primarily a biography, not a critical study.

G. B. S. Then you have outharrised Harris in suggesting that Anne was a guilty Hermione, and that Ajax is a lampoon on Ben Jonson. About *Troilus and Cressida* you go quite mad, finding nearly all the main characters autobiographical. Why did you miss your chance of identifying Mrs. John Shakespeare with the queen in *Hamlet* ?

H. P. You must re-read my book more carefully. I make it clear that if Anne were guilty she was only so in Shakespeare's imagination. Further, I do not say that Hermione was Anne : I merely pose the possibility that one aspect of her behaviour is glanced at in the character. There is no doubt whatever in

my mind that the Leontes-Hermione relationship is taken from life : it is altogether too vivid to be the effect of fancy. Later reflection however has led me to believe that the whole situation centres on Shakespeare's position in the Davenant household. He was Mrs. Davenant's lover, and the father of one of her children. I now think that Hermione is a portrait of her, and that Leontes is partly Shakespeare and partly Davenant.

G. B. S. And what about Ajax ?

H. P. A caricature, not a portrait, of Ben Jonson.

G. B. S. At that rate you can turn anything into anybody to suit your own convenience.

H. P. I have no convenience to be suited, not being any kind of fanatic. I am simply and solely interested in Shakespeare as a man : I therefore have no belief to buttress, no institution to support, no pet theories to propagate. Anyone can see that Shakespeare was in a state of mental and physical disturbance when he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, and when a dramatist is not in command of himself he is not in command of his characters. He reveals himself in the most unexpected places, and he cannot attain coherence of portraiture. That is why, biographically speaking, an inferior work like *Timon of Athens* is far more interesting than a masterpiece like *Macbeth*.

G. B. S. You say nothing about the queer difference of *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* from the Shakespeare canon generally ; also to some extent *Troilus*. Robertson, who was a Chapmaniac, gave them to Chapman. There is no mistaking Shakespeare's hand in them, but there seems to be another mind at work in them as well as his, whereas in the other plays the original author counts for nothing.

H. P. Again I ask you to re-read my book, where you will find the explanation of the seeming difference of those plays set forth quite clearly. Shakespeare was not only ill (I should say with venereal disease) when he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, but he had just passed through a crisis in his affairs : the Essex business,

which involved the fate of his patron Southampton. He had not recovered when he wrote *All's Well*, and was only convalescent when he reached *Measure for Measure*. The same lack of balance reappears in his last plays, and for the same reason. I myself am certain, and I have more than hinted it in my book, that his death was hastened by what Pistol calls "malady of France."

G. B. S. I doubt if such a view would be popular in England.

H. P. No : the only views that are received with credulity in England are wholly imbecile : (1) that he did not write his plays, and (2) that he was a pederast. Your friend Robertson dealt with the first, which of course could only be held by an ass who is also a snob. The people who disagree as to who wrote the plays, he said, all agree that they could only have been written by a peer of the realm. The second view, naturally, is mostly held by pederasts, who like to mistake sycophancy for homosexuality.

G. B. S. All the same the hackneyed plea that Shakespeare's sonnets are only a fashionable convention won't do. Mr. W. H. was evidently one of those rare persons whose personal beauty enchanted lovers of their own sex, *not* sexually. The only living W. H. as far as I know is Lord Alfred Douglas (now in his seventies), and his edition of the *Sonnets* is the only book about them worth your reading. He was an amazingly pretty youth, not a pederast.

H. P. I stand by every word I have written in my book. I am as certain that Shakespeare was addressing his patron Southampton as I am certain that I am addressing you at this moment. I know all about Douglas ; and having spent about thirty-six years in the constant company of Shakespeare, through the medium of his plays, I think I may claim that I know a good deal about *him*.

G. B. S. I won't gainsay it, for your book proves it. You have come out of it very successfully because you are a genuine soaker in Shakespeare, and have not read him as a task. You have him by heart ; and your quotations leave all the other biographers nowhere.

I had no idea of this : it throws a new spotlight on you.

H. P. On Shakespeare, too, I hope.

On reading this Shaw became more irritable than I had ever known him to be. Apart from his natural dislike of having his attitude to anything controverted, I fancy that the favourable reception by press and public of my *Life of Wilde* had annoyed him a good deal.

"Burn all this rubbish!" were his opening words. "It lets the book down and lets us both down." He then proceeded to lecture me, his opinions being those of a respectable don delivered in the style of a ruthless dictator :

"You must revise and correct the book. The passage about Jonson is such a howler that anyone with the most elementary Elizabethan competence would shut the book and throw it into the dustbin after a glance at it. You think of Jonson as a coarse old curmudgeon, and Shakespeare as a young aspiring poet. Shakespeare was ten years older than Jonson, fully established in the theatre when Jonson came to it as an unknown beginner. Shakespeare, the elder and admittedly greater playwright, spotted his talent and helped him into notice. This relation between them never changed : to the end Jonson venerated Shakespeare 'this side idolatry.' His tribute to him after his death is one of the noblest and most obviously sincere in literature. Your suggestion that Ajax was a caricature of Jonson is an outrage. It is utterly stupid. That Shakespeare should have described his young friend who wrote not only biting comedies but exquisite lyrics, toasts and epitaphs, and who loved him 'this side idolatry,' as a beef-witted mongrel, is going beyond all toleration. Ajax is clearly not a caricature of anyone. He is simply a stage blockhead."

This outburst took me by surprise ; but I pulled myself together and gave him shell for shot :

"What you have just said merely proves your complete ignorance of the Elizabethan stage. Apparently you have never heard of the famous War of the Theatres, when Jonson and Shakespeare were in opposite camps spitting rage at one

another. Let me remind you of what Jonson had to say when in a mood of disgust with the theatre and with Shakespeare's continued popularity long after his death :

*No doubt some mouldy tale
Like Pericles, and stale
As the shrieve's crusts, and nasty as his fish—
Scraps out of every dish
Thrown forth, and raked into the common tub,
May keep up the Play-club :
There, sweepings do as well
As the best-order'd meal ;
For who the relish of these guests will fit,
Needs set them but the alms-basket of wit . . .”*

“ *Pericles* must have been a disappointment to Jonson from the author of *Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*,” Shaw replied, “ and he ridiculed it accordingly. When the play I have just finished is published it will most pitifully disappoint people who are expecting another *St. Joan* or *Heartbreak House* ; but that will not establish a lifelong feud between us.”

Feeble, but I let it go, and continued :

“ In *Every Man out of His Humour* Jonson poked fun at Shakespeare's gentility and at his coat of arms, and again in *The Poetaster* he scoffed not only at Shakespeare's social pretensions but at his high-faluting style of writing. Shakespeare replied in *Troilus and Cressida*, concerning which a contemporary wrote that ‘ our fellow Shakespeare hath given him (Jonson) a purge that made him bewray his credit.’ The purge is obviously Ajax, who is partly, as you say, a stage blockhead, but definitely Jonson, as Shakespeare felt about him during their quarrel, in this passage : ‘ He is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant : a man into whom nature hath so crowded humours that his valour is crushed into folly, his folly sauced with discretion : there is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attain but he carries some stain of it. He is melancholy without cause, and merry against the hair ; he hath the joints of

everything, but everything is so out of joint that he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and no use ; or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight.' No stage blockhead or beef-witted mongrel about that ! but the most brilliant thumbnail sketch of a perverse genius in all literature, and exactly fitted to everything we know about Jonson."

" The great passage about Ajax which you quote, and which I had forgotten, is not a caricature, but a gorgeous tribute from a friend," said Shaw.

I waited for more, but waited in vain. He felt that he had settled the question conclusively, and I was accustomed to his method of never admitting an error, a trait common to all totalitarians, and getting out of a difficult situation by making his opponent's thunder appear to be his own lightning. While I was still musing on this he launched another attack :

" Chapman was Shakespeare's contemporary and his rival. He was famous as a scholar and the translator of Homer. The ' proud sail ' of his blank verse exactly describes it. To call a man who wrote the Bussey d'Amboise plays dull and pedantic, and negligible as a rival, is to put yourself out of court as a critic. The death of Chapman in poverty is so pitiable that it is not only stupid but ungenerous to disparage him. He was really a great literary figure."

I took a deep breath, and then let fly :

" Your ignorance extends from the Elizabethan stage to your own works. You seem to be unaware of the fact that, in the preface to a play called *The Admirable Bashville*, a writer named Bernard Shaw referred to Chapman as ' a blathering unreadable pedant, like Landor.' Elsewhere you speak of his balderdash and his bullying heroes, you describe Jonson as a brutish pedant, and you sum up the Elizabethan dramatists as braggarts, liars, humbugs, cut-throats, penny-a-liners, and so on. Yet you have the calm effrontery to tell me now that Chapman was a really great literary figure, and that it is not only stupid but ungenerous to disparage him because his death in poverty was so pitiable. This from the man who wrote of Fielding's and Smollett's small and smutty literary property, from one who wished to dig up Shakespeare and throw stones at him,

who expressed his contempt for the mental equipment of Homer, Shakespeare and Walter Scott, who spoke of Thackeray's clumsy hand and enslaved mind, of Dr. Johnson wasting his time talking with literary fools in a tavern, and of the resemblance between Wordsworth, the greatest poet since Shakespeare, and George III! Did Oscar Wilde's pitiable and poverty-stricken death prevent you from saying (on the sole evidence of Frank Harris, the biggest liar in literature) that he ended as an unproductive drunkard and swindler? "

My feat of memory shook him, and for a moment I expected something in the nature of a climb-down. But he had not been a platform performer for nothing, and he recovered his poise before I recovered my breath.

"When I had to smash Bardolatry in the lump," he said, "I had to fight so foully that any critic can disqualify me by a few quotations; but I did the trick and shattered the idol set up by Coleridge, Lamb and Swinburne. That does not prove that Jonson was the rival mentioned in the *Sonnets*."

I had never in my life so much as hinted that Jonson was the rival in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*; but as he had accused me of saying so on several previous occasions, and as I had continually denied it in vain, I let it pass. It was clearly useless to prolong the controversy. After all, he was ninety years old, and it flashed upon me that if I lived to the age of seventy I should long have lost the power and the inclination to argue about anything.

AN IRVING STORY

I NEXT saw G.B.S. on Saturday, 18th January, 1947. Mr. Sebastian Shaw, the actor, was keen to build up a repertory of Shavian works and asked me to take him down and introduce him to the sage of Ayot St. Lawrence. I did so. It was a fine day, and when we arrived G.B.S. was strolling round his garden with the aid of a stick. We stayed to tea and enjoyed two hours of his conversation. One of the first things he asked was whether my companion knew who had produced *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God* on the wireless recently. "No." "Then I wish you'd find out who he is," said G.B.S., "and tell him I am annoyed that the commencement of the story has been dragged in at the end of it."

When the subject of the repertory came up, he said that the Macdona Players had been "awful" and that it was high time a permanent Shavian repertory was in being: "It is needed as much as a Shakespearian or a Gilbert and Sullivan repertory." He told us very emphatically what he thought of the film that had been made of *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and said that he would like to see me in the part of Cæsar on the stage. I appreciated the compliment but felt that it would have been more serviceable some fifteen years earlier when I was still an actor. He talked of Barry Sullivan, whose methods he described, giving us certain lines in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III* as he had heard Sullivan render them. He assured us that Sullivan was the last of the school of superhuman actors: he had the grand manner: he was a being from another sphere: no one to compare with him had appeared on the stage since his day.

After some business chit-chat between Shaw the author and Shaw the actor, I mentioned that I had at last decided to write a Life of Dickens. This appeared to please G.B.S. greatly, and he said that I must concentrate on the Ellen Ternan affair. "My job is to concentrate on Charles Dickens," I replied, "though Ellen Ternan will have to be dealt with as an important influence on his life and art." I inquired whether he had kept any of the letters which he had received from Kate Perugini, Dickens's daughter.

"No. She requested me to send back all her letters shortly before her death; and when I asked her why, she replied that she did not like to think that they would be read by other people after my death. In particular she did not wish her description of Sir Henry Irving's behaviour at her own table to become known."

"I'm sure you don't share her secretiveness. How did Irving behave? I promise not to report it except in print."

"One evening Irving and Ellen Terry dined with the Peruginis. From the moment of his arrival until dinner was half over Irving behaved exactly like an archbishop, very grave, very stately, scarcely opening his mouth except to put something into it, occasionally agreeing with what was said with a faint inclination of the head, now and then intimating his disagreement with a slight lifting of the nostril. Ellen tried hard to draw him out, but her failure to make him look less like a Chinese mandarin posing for a statue was as complete as that of their host and hostess. At last someone mentioned a press notice of one of his performances. Instantly his face flashed into life, and he burst into speech: in fact he talked so fluently that no one else could slip in a syllable. He went on and on and on, all about the press notice, until Ellen had to stop him with 'Really, Henry, I think the subject is exhausted. Let's discuss something else.'"

When G.B.S. was seeing us off in the hall I asked whether he had finished his new play. He replied that he had a lot of revision to do, that the writing of it had nearly killed him, and that he doubted if it would ever be done to his satisfaction. While he was speaking the telephone bell rang, and he was

informed that *The News of the World* wanted a word with him. He took the receiver, and we heard him say that his new play would first appear at Malvern, if at all, but that it would probably never be fit for production. He added : " I am an old man, and I write drivel." With these words he closed the conversation, though the sounds that came from the receiver as he put it back suggested to us that the fellow at the other end was in a communicative mood.

WAITING TO DIE

LORD PASSFIELD died in the autumn of 1947, and Shaw wrote to *The Times*: "May I claim Westminster Abbey for the ashes of Sidney Webb, even should St. Paul's demand him as our greatest cockney?" Accordingly the urns containing the ashes of Sidney and Beatrice Webb were placed in the Abbey; and everyone, except perhaps a few Anglican zealots, felt that these were the right relics in the right place.

On March 14th, '48, Eleanor O'Connell visited Shaw at Ayot, and on the same day sent me one of her excellent boswellian reports:

"Why are you going to America?" was his greeting.

"Because I want more freedom than I can get at present in England."

"The only country in the world where you can get real freedom is Russia," lectured Shaw, who, like a good totalitarian, had all his words by heart. "The greatest man alive is Stalin; another, nearly as great, Masaryk, has just been driven to suicide: I knew him personally, and he was a very fine man. You know, Russia does not want another war; you must not believe what you read in the newspapers. Stalin realises that a war would kill Russia, and he will not make any great mistakes, because if he did he would be shot."

"If you had lived in Russia instead of England during the greater part of your life, you would certainly have been shot," she countered.

"Stalin is a good Fabian, and that's the best that can be said about anyone," replied Shaw.

They then discussed Freedom, Shaw advancing all the hoary arguments in favour of control ("Where would we be without

policemen? ”), she making all the obvious replies, until he got tired of it and said : “ I cannot try in the space of a short visit to teach you the elements of socialism.”

Their conversation became personal ; but as it partly dealt with me, mock-modesty prevents me from recording it. It was interrupted by the announcement that two people had called and wished to see him. “ They must wait,” he said in tones that were audible to the callers. She discovered that all through the winter he had refused to have fires, carrying an electric stove with him from room to room, in lifting which he had one day ricked his back and sent for an osteopath to put it right. She was delighted to find that he had become much attached to a large ginger Persian cat, which followed him about, sat on his knees, and was the recipient of his confidences in appropriate language. She noticed that he was deafer and more frail than when she had last seen him, that he never moved without a stick, and was reluctant to leave his chair. “ I am waiting to die,” he said. “ I have nothing more to do. And I am very tired.” He kissed her good-bye with the words, “ Old men’s kisses are like dust.”

He was however in fairly good form when I spent a couple of hours with him some weeks later, and he even remembered that I had asked him for details of Keir Hardie about eighteen months before :

“ Did you do that film ? ” he asked.

“ No. I didn’t find him interesting enough.”

“ He was a simple fellow. He couldn’t understand how an English gentleman like Sir Edward Grey could tell the most appalling lies without a flicker of shame and then leave the House of Commons with the impression that his opponent was the liar. I remember Hardie saying that he had once spoken on socialism to the dockers for an hour in the pelting rain, most of his audience cowering under a wall to keep dry. When he had finished a man asked ‘ Why has the speaker not uttered one word about politics ? What is his opinion on Welsh Disestablishment ? ’ At an I.L.P. meeting in Bradford Hardie was in a quandary as to his policy over the landlords. He mentioned his difficulty to me on our way in. I briefly out-

lined a policy for him, and said 'Tell them that all unearned income must be taxed.' He promptly made that the main item in his programme. He was not adroit; he couldn't handle people, hadn't the smallest notion of how to deal with politicians or parliament. He was just a plain honest man, the very opposite of Ramsay MacDonald, who understood the whole game at once."

It occurred to me that I had never asked Shaw whether he had met or tried to meet or correspond with the god of his early idolatry, Henrik Ibsen, so I put the question to him now. "No contacts whatever," he replied. "But I was intimate with William Archer who had Norwegian cousins and spoke the language. He was more than a bit of a poet, and was deeply affected by the poetic side of Ibsen. He communicated this influence to me, and translated passages to me viva voce before Ibsen was generally known in England. Archer had visited Ibsen, in whose study was a striking portrait. He asked whose portrait it was. Ibsen replied with a chuckle 'Strindberg. Isn't he MAD!' Much later I asked Nansen what Ibsen was like personally. All I got from him was that Ibsen drank enormously."

I remarked that Ibsen had longed for power; and if he had got it, he would have played merry hell with humanity like all the other power-maniacs, whom I mentioned.

"When you start slanging Cæsar, Cromwell, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler and the rest, don't forget that they all tried democracy and found it couldn't even keep them out of prison," said Shaw.

He had written this in an article some years before, and I had made the same comment on it as now:

"Precisely the same thing may be urged in favour of Charles Peace, Crippen, Landru, Jack the Ripper, Burke, Hare, and all the totalitarians who are now doing seven-year sentences on Dartmoor. But none of the loonies you name tried democracy when they were in a position to do the job properly, any more than Stalin tries it now."

"You are quite hopeless on the subject."

"I hope so."

Without wishing to waste more time on this tedious and unprofitable theme, I handed him a typed report of what he had told me on two previous occasions about his final relationship with Granville-Barker, assuring him that I had no intention of publishing it until all the people concerned were dead. He read it through carefully, said it was absolutely correct, and at my request agreed to send me his confirmation of it in writing—which he did a few days later.

"I give you full marks as a Boswell," he said, putting my report away. "By the bye, it may interest you to know that Archibald Henderson has just written to say he is thinking of bringing out a new edition of his monumental work on me. I have advised him not to be in a hurry with it, as your biography is still selling enormously and is practically up to date; and I have told him that though he may be able to improve on your work critically, as biography NO."

"Thank you. But what's wrong with my book critically?"

"Good God!" he cried: "are you claiming infallibility? Whaur's your Julius-Boncy-Adolf noo?"

"A hit, a very palpable hit," I quoted. "I had forgotten your admirable example."

"What admirable example?"

"When it suits your purpose, you act on the principle that there is no recommendation like self-dispraise."

"A touch, a touch, I do confess," he laughed, adding: "We are both well up in *Hamlet*, it seems."

He next spoke of someone who was "so determined to be my oldest and dearest friend" that he was extremely useful; and when I asked him whether he ever felt lonely, he said: "Lonely? No such luck! I could do with a little solitude. This place is like the editorial office of a big newspaper on the eve of a great war. What with the telephone bell ringing, the door bell buzzing, the door knocker banging, and the number of people who try to force their way in or climb trees to take snapshots of me as I totter about the garden, I believe life in Piccadilly Circus would be relatively monastic." I laughed and he continued: "But even if I cannot enjoy solitude, since the death of my wife I have been my own master, which I find

very restful. She was so careful of my privacy that I hardly had a moment to myself. That of course is an exaggeration ; but it will give you some idea of her attentiveness when I say that during one of my illnesses she got up from her sick bed and sat outside my bedroom door waiting for the doctor, as she wanted the very latest news from an authoritative source. In the last few years of her life she made me sing to her every night, and I had to be in bed by eleven. Since her death I haven't touched the piano and am never in bed before twelve. She made me drive her all over Great Britain and the Continent, and travel all over the world. But my real nature is to remain rooted to one spot, like a tree, and since her death my longest journeys have been from Ayot to London and back. Funny how she hated caricatures of me—I don't much care for them myself—and wouldn't have one in the house. Max Beerbohm once did a clever thing of me in which I looked slightly tipsy. She bought it at the exhibition and tore it up in front of his face. She was rather given to tears, and would cry all over me, but I got used to it and realised that one of my marital duties was to represent a sort of wailing-body."

Admittedly this must have been a little trying, but Shaw sometimes got his own back by leaving the wireless on until his wife, who loathed it, left the room, when he switched it off and settled down to read. Blanche Patch told me that in August '47, when she was spending a week-end at Ayot, the wireless, just behind her chair, was kept going during dinner, making conversation impossible. After about twenty minutes of it Shaw said "D'you think anyone takes any interest in this?" The cricket results were being broadcast. But as the Week in Parliament followed, which at least interested *him*, the noise continued for the rest of the meal. On a later visit she learnt that, though it was quite unnecessary in his case, he paid the weekly insurance required by the new medical service, because he was "a socialist on principle."

Shaw began a new play a day or two before his ninety-second birthday, and told me on a post card replying to something I had asked him that he had got into "the second wind of his second childhood." His card was dated July 26th, and

he wished me many happy returns of his birthday, which made me wonder whether a second wind was good for him. The Arts Theatre Club gave a special performance of *Too True To Be Good* that evening, and Esmé Percy, whose production of it was well-nigh perfect, had asked me to contribute a few words on the play for the programme. For the sake of what followed the appearance of my Note, I print it :

"The main theme of *Too Good To Be True* is the wretchedness of the rich, and the play is therefore a variation or development of *Heartbreak House*. It was written in 1931 ; but to say that it is dated because it is seventeen years old is like saying that the Russian menace is dated because it is seventy years old. As most of Shaw's plays were post-dated when written by about half a century, this one has the peculiarly Shavian quality of being more up to date now than when it was first produced, more modern than any play by someone young enough to be the author's great-grandchild ; and though *Private Meek* is a portrait of Lawrence of Arabia, the type is perennial. But the play's chief quality, as always with Shaw, is the gaiety with which a serious subject is treated. An amusing sidelight on the famous closing speech was given me by the writer : ' There is a passage at the end of *Too True To Be Good* which caused the then Dean of Worcester (Moore Ede) to preach an impassioned sermon on it. I scribbled it down at rehearsal because we could not get the curtain down at the right instant to choke off Cedric Hardwicke's oration ; and I had to provide some lines for him to go on with in case of need.' "

The programme containing this must have been sent to Shaw, because I received a card from him on which the single word was written : " Why ? " The question being obscure, I replied : " What ? " He returned : " The Note." I parried, " Oh, that ! " He answered : " Yes." I gave in : " God knows ! " Back came the assertion : " He doesn't." There was but one retort : " Nor do I." This interchange was more like the cross-talk of two Music Hall comedians than the correspondence of a philosopher with his biographer ; but it explains why this philosopher appealed to this biographer.

Nothing short of death could stop Shaw's pen or shut his mouth. In the autumn of '48 he told a newspaper reporter that he always would be a foreigner in England "because I am one of the few people here who think objectively," and that he would be quite willing to write an article for £1000 in which the whole relationship between England and Ireland would be shown in its proper light. He sent a long letter to *The Times* advocating the production of a political dictionary, as people were hopelessly fogged over the meaning of such terms as communism, and the present misunderstandings would lead to a war that nobody wanted. Another long letter appeared in *The New Statesman*, the subject being Napoleon; while in *The Daily Worker* the most widely publicised man in the world, complaining that his public utterances had been boycotted by the British press for many years, took the opportunity of praising Russian communism and dispraising everything and everyone antagonistic to Stalin's conception of democracy. His new play *Buoyant Billions*, which closes with a paean to the glory of mathematical passion ("Our pleasure in it promises a development in which life will be an intellectual ecstasy surpassing the ecstasies of saints"), was produced at Zurich in October '48 before a respectful if uncomprehending audience. The original title of this "comedy of no manners" was *O Bee! Buzzy Bee*, but on reflection the author thought worse of it.

In the first week of March '49 Shaw issued *Sixteen Self Sketches*, perhaps the only example in history of a readable book by a nonagenarian. Some of it had appeared elsewhere; much was repetitive; but there were two biographical novelties. Shaw had come across some letters which his father had written to his mother, who was on a visit to her relations, in July, 1857, G.B.S. being then one year old. From these we learn that the baby caused as much uneasiness in the domestic circle as the man was later to arouse in theatrical and political circles. Unruly and outrageous, he howled the place down when he could not get what he wanted, pulled his hat to pieces, signified an early contempt for journalism by tearing the newspaper to bits, and was the despair of his

nurse. Once he fell out of bed on to his head ; but most babies seem to be made of indiarubber, and he took it in his bounce. Another time he fell backwards off the kitchen table, his head going clean through a window-pane and hitting the iron bar outside. The household was in a panic ; but he remained calm. If his experiences in the next ten years at all resembled those at the age of one, he was fated to become a dramatist.

But the only novelty of importance in the book is what Shaw called a *shameful secret*, which he had kept all his life, not even confiding it to his wife. In the nineteenth century the religion of the ruling classes in Ireland was Protestant, and their children were brought up to regard Roman Catholics as untouchable. As Shaw learnt nothing at the Wesleyan school he attended, he was removed from it at the age of twelve and sent to a school where the pupils were the children of lower middle class Catholic shopkeepers, whom he had always been taught to despise. He instantly lost caste, and was cut dead by the friends he had made at the Protestant school, who treated him as a social leper. After seven months of it he struck, and was sent to another Protestant school, where he continued to learn nothing but recovered his self-respect. For eighty years he was unable to mention this incident in his life, he wrote, "yet now that I have broken through the habit of ashamed silence, and made not only a clean breast of it but a clear brain, I am completely cured."

Psycho-analysts will reap a rich harvest from this Shavian revelation ; but my own feeling is that Shaw was making the best (i.e. the worst) of something he had just remembered. By this means he was able to add another touch of drama to his self-portrait, hardly to be expected from a man of ninety-two. He was able to get abreast of Dickens, whose experience in a blacking warehouse, of which he made full use in his work, was a "shameful secret." I recall that Shaw became quite pceevish over the comparison between Shakespeare and Barker at the close of my essay on the first production of *Androcles*, which I showed him before broadcasting a part of it in February '49. He did not like to think that Shakespeare had

been through more soul-searching experiences than himself. "There is no evidence that Shakespeare was ever hungry or ill-clad," he said. "I was worse off, as my father was never successful in business. Shakespeare never had to fight his way : he rose soon by sheer gravitation and never looked back, any more than Wells and Kipling and Dickens. Think of *my* nine years of utter failure !" I did not wish to start a debate, so I thought of *King Lear* and held my peace.

Shaw liked to see himself as a missionary, not as a man ; as a prophet, not as a person ; and in one of these Sketches he explained why he had never written an autobiography, his two reasons merely proving that his sense of reality was intermittent. (1) Ninety-nine-point-nine per cent of him, he asserted, was the same as everyone else, and he could not pick out and describe the point-one per cent that differed from other human beings. Though it may not appear so on the surface, this was part of his propaganda as a social reformer. In a socialist state everyone has to be treated alike : therefore socialists have to assume that everyone requires a like treatment ; in other words, that people are all the same, Jesus Christ being another name for Julius Cæsar, Stalin for St. Francis, and Bill Smith for Bernard Shaw. Such is the cant of our time ; whereas the truth is that people are as dissimilar as their tastes, their beliefs, their reactions, their faces and their finger-prints. (2) He further declared that he was not interesting biographically because he had never killed anyone and had experienced no physical adventures. This notion that a melodramatic career provides material for a good book is contradicted by every first-class biography in literature. I once discussed the point with Shaw, but apparently my words fell on deaf ears. "What goes on in the mind is far more adventurous and exciting than what happens to the body," I said.

"That may be," he replied : "and as all my mental adventures will be found in my works, there's no need for a biography."

"But there's a great deal you've had to leave out of your works, and a great deal in your works that can only be explained by a knowledge of your life and character. And the fact

remains that the really great biographies are about thinkers, not doers."

Challenged to name them, I mentioned Plato's Socrates.

"Plato invented Socrates," said he.

"Did Xenophon invent him too?" I asked. "He gives a more vivid portrait than Plato."

"It's the Socrates of Plato that everyone knows."

"Well, what about Dr. Johnson?"

"A creation of Boswell's."

"Then there must have been a crowd of great creators busy on him," I retorted, "because many people reproduced his conversation quite as well as Boswell."

"But it is Boswell's picture that survives."

It was useless to prolong the discussion, because Shaw always acted on the principle: Never argue, repeat your assertion. Which, of course, is the favourite stand-by of prophets and utopians. But Plato and Boswell proved my point. Even on the fantastic assumption that they had created Socrates and Johnson, at least it did not occur to them to create men of action, though physical adventures are far more easily imagined than spiritual ones.

Before leaving the autobiographical notes he issued in 1949, I must mention that a very significant phrase, omitted from the letter he wrote to Frank Harris about his sex life as published in Harris's book on Shaw, was slipped into the same letter as printed in *Sixteen Self Sketches*. It deals with himself and his wife, and finally disposes of all conjecture on the nature of their marriage: "As man and wife we found a new relation in which sex had no part." It was characteristic of Shaw to interpolate this passage, leaving it to be understood that it was in the original letter. He had a habit of altering or adding to his private letters and even his essays when his permission was sought for quoting them in other people's books. It was part of his policy of bringing facts up to date, as he once put it, which perfectly describes the tricky methods of totalitarians in all ages.

In May, 1949, G.B.S. determined to get rid of all his possessions in his Whitehall Court flat. As he had no intention

of visiting London again, "except in a hearse to Golder's Green," he had made up his mind some months previously to abandon his London flat and take a small one in the same building merely as an office for his secretary. But Blanche Patch was informed at the end of May that everything, furniture, books, pictures, even carpets, had to be cleared out of the flat in two days. This sudden move was not only unnecessary but impossible, and she protested. But he was adamant. The job was done, not in two days, but within a week ; and except for the furniture of his office, the rest was removed for an auction sale. He wished to keep nothing, not even the many copies of books presented to him by famous contemporaries like Wells, nor the bust of Lady Astor, which was duly catalogued as "the bust of Mrs. Sidney Webb." Two carpets were sent down to Ayot because they would be useful there ; but he ordered them to be returned, as he wanted cash not carpets. Innumerable papers had to be destroyed and everything turned into money, said the man who was quite unable to deal with the huge sums he received regularly from film, play and book royalties. It was a form of mania, induced no doubt by a lifelong preoccupation with economics, just as the decision to move his belongings at a moment's notice was the insane whim of a man who had never ceased to admire dictators.

His genial ferocity, adopted as a mask in earlier days, had become second nature ; and his comments on the wireless performances of his plays were of a nature to make the officials of the B.B.C. nervous of approaching him for permission to broadcast his works. His humour, seldom of a rich nature, had become inhuman. He was still pleasant and amusing in personal converse ; but with a pen in his hand or speaking from the other end of a telephone, he was frequently abrupt. He had not mellowed with age. A good deal of this may have been due to the irritating feeling that, while persisting in his praise of Russian communism, he had backed the wrong horse. His persistence was due to something in his nature which forbade him to admit that he could ever be wrong. He could not go back on his life's work, the issue

of which, though resulting in tyranny, mendacity, iron curtains, slavery, and every known form of cruelty, he had hailed as the coming of a new world, *his* world, the civilisation for which he had fought. Perhaps it was too much to expect that a nonagenarian should perceive the dawn of his dreams to be the night of his endeavours. Anyhow, this one stuck to his guns, and banged away at everyone who questioned the infallibility of his judgment. He considered himself the Pope of his faith and the Stalin of his creed. His word was law, to himself no less than to others, and in killing his social conscience he passed on some of his internal discomfort to his fellow-creatures.

His play *Buoyant Billions* was admirably produced by Esmé Percy at the Malvern Festival, the first for ten years, in August '49, and was favourably received, though it only ran for five weeks when put on in London at the beginning of October. Towards the close of the year I showed him an article I had written on Granville-Barker for my book *The Last Actor-Managers*. He made a few corrections, and while on the subject told me that no one within his experience had made such a habit of falling in love and getting engaged to be married as Barker, whose infatuation with Helen Huntingdon, his second wife, and utter subjection to her for the rest of his life, Shaw described as a tragedy.

We discussed one or two other matters, and then I asked him how he had first got to know Lady Astor. "I have always refused to play the society clown and declined all the invitations she sent me," he replied. "Then I met her at someone else's house, liked her at once, and began to accept her invitations." She had been extremely useful to him, because she had influenced *The Times* to publish his letters, which was the only sort of official recognition he cared about, and meant far more to him than a dukedom or the Order of Merit.

I wished to know whether he ever missed any of his old friends, H. G. Wells for example. "I don't miss anyone except myself." "Yourself?" "The man I used to be." "Oh!" He again told me, what I could not publish while Wells was alive, that the big dust-up in the Fabian Society had been due

to the fact that the Webbs had warned Bland and Olivier to advise their daughters to keep clear of Wells, who would try to seduce them. When Bland spoke to his daughter about it, she calmly informed him that Wells had described him as a fearful roué and had mentioned some of the women who had surrendered to him. As a result Bland was furious with Wells, who was equally furious with the Webbs. This private vendetta was carefully camouflaged by the pretended disagreement over policy and explains Shaw's ruthless debating methods in disposing of Wells.

Before I left, Shaw said "I am not *persona grata* with the Cabinet just now," which, considering that he more than anyone else had been responsible for a Socialist Government, amused me. He also complained that he was being robbed by the Revenue. Further inquiry elicited the fact that he had asked the film companies to withhold his royalties until he applied for them, that the Income Tax authorities had declined to let him use the film people as his bankers, and that as a consequence he would have to pay £140,000 to the Revenue during the year 1950.

BEWITCHED

THE DEATH of Mrs. Granville-Barker in February '50 enables me to record here the more important part of Shaw's confession to me some years earlier about his enforced separation from her husband. He had very unwillingly been involved in the arrangements leading to Barker's divorce from his first wife, and had managed matters in a way that had aroused the hostility of Helen Huntingdon, who became Barker's second wife. "In addition Helen hated my influence on Barker," said Shaw. "Never having got beyond 1865, everything that has happened in literature since then is anathema to her, especially the works of Shaw. He was completely dominated by her, ceasing to be the independent human being we had all known. She made him throw over Socialism as well as Shaw ; she made him do translations of Spanish plays, or put his name to her translations ; she cut him off from all commerce with the theatre ; she tried to turn him into a country gentleman, but as he could neither hunt, shoot nor fish, it was a hopeless proposition. . . . When the Labour Party came to power Ramsay MacDonald and the rest tried hard to find some supporters who would not disgrace them in the Upper House, and Barker would certainly have been given a peerage if his wife had not forced him to abandon Socialism, a reflection that must have been gall and wormwood to her.

"Her hatred of me manifested itself in a most uncomfortable manner. In May, 1925, there was a meeting at King's College in the Strand to hear Barker give an address on the theatre. A. J. Balfour was in the chair ; I was down to second the vote of thanks, Forbes-Robertson to propose it. When I

arrived I was shown into the Green Room and found Balfour there alone. We chatted together for several minutes when I walked Mrs. Barker, with chains of pearls decorating her neck and bosom. She is one of those people whose faces I can never remember, her appearance being entirely negative, so that each time I see her I seem to see her for the first time ; but I recognised her pearls, so all was well. Naturally I expected her to be distant, if not openly hostile ; but to my surprise she came straight up to me and spoke in a most friendly manner. Then I recalled that Balfour had recently been made an Earl, and all became clear. She could swallow me with Balfour, but she could not take me neat.

"After Barker had delivered his address, and Forbes-Robertson had proposed the vote of thanks, I rose to second it. The devil entered into me. I was at the top of my form. I praised Barker's speech to the skies, and said that his retirement from the stage to become a professor was inexcusable. Barker as a professor ! I exclaimed. It was unthinkable. Why, the speech he had just given contained enough matter to make twenty professors ! I brought down the house by protesting that his retirement from active work in the theatre was a public scandal. No answer seemed possible for Barker ; but Balfour tactfully saved his face by bringing the meeting to a close. Mrs. Granville-Barker never forgave me for this exploit.

"What happened then was most extraordinary. The moment I got up to leave the platform I felt that my spine had been converted into a bar of rusty iron which grated on the base of my skull. The pain at the top and bottom of my spine was so frightful that I could not even bend down to get into a taxi. Somehow I reached home on foot, and when my wife arrived I was lying flat and helpless on my bed. The doctors could make nothing of it, and I really thought I was done for. I was brought down here to Ayot and after a while began to hobble about a bit ; but I daren't go farther than the garden gate ; until, one day, with a great effort of the will, I decided to walk down the road, come what might. Instantly and miraculously the pain left me, and I recovered

completely. I noticed that it was exactly one month to the hour since I had been stricken down by this inexplicable and horrible disablement.

"Some time later I met Lady — (what's her name? she kept a dress shop in Bond Street or Brook Street or somewhere thereabouts), anyhow she had been present at the King's College meeting, and I told her what had happened to me. That, she said, was easily explained. She had watched Mrs. Barker, who was sitting exactly behind me, and who had been leaning forward in her seat while I was speaking, every muscle in her face and body rigid with hate. There was not the slightest doubt that she had bewitched me. And after hearing this I could conceive of no other explanation.

"When Harley Granville-Barker died I handed over to the British Museum all the papers and unpublished plays of his that were left in my hands. The separation between us which followed his marriage was not an estrangement. I communicated the death of my wife in 1943 to him (they had been attached friends) and his reply was on our old terms. Gabriel Pascal had pressed him to return to the stage and play the Inquisitor in a projected filming of *Saint Joan*; and he had entertained the suggestion until his wife's disapproval put a summary end to his relations with Pascal. He knew the story of my bewitchment at King's College. I told him. I always respected strictly Mrs. Granville-Barker's right to a share in his circle of friends; and, much as I regretted her antipathy to me, never acted against her in any way. As far as I know her complete ascendancy over him remained unshaken until the end."

THE MODERN METHUSELAH

I LAST spoke to Shaw at the end of June, 1950. We had a pleasant talk, but little worth recording. Two queries had recently been sent me by correspondents, and I put them to him :

" There seems to be a tradition in the theatre that in the original production of *Androcles* the Blue Danube waltz was played when the Lion and Androcles dance off together. I can't remember. Can you ? "

" It was not the Blue Danube but a Spanish dance, then very popular," and he whistled it.

" As William Morris died in 1896 when Oscar Wilde was in Reading Gaol, what is your authority, quoted by me, for saying that Wilde was the only person Morris could bear to see on his deathbed ? "

" Morris took a terrible time to die : nearly two years. Wilde paid his visit in the early stages before Reading Gaol was thought of. Morris said he was never so entertained in his life."

He asked what I was then writing, and I told him a *Life of Disraeli*.

" I could not read his novels because they are all about upper ten ladies and gentlemen, whom I cannot abide," said Shaw. " The same applies to Meredith. Disraeli is historically important as the founder of Tory Democracy."

" I find him interesting as a man ; otherwise I wouldn't be writing about him. By the way a great admirer of yours wants to shake you by the hand. May I bring him down ? "

" I don't want to see ANYBODY, and I don't want anybody to see me. You don't know what it is to be as old

as I am. Do you suppose I want the great G. B. S. to be remembered as a doddering old skeleton? ”

His ninety-fourth birthday was celebrated by the Arts Theatre, which put on *Heartbreak House* ; and at the request of Mr. Alec Clunes I again wrote a Note for the programme, but this time the author did not ask “Why?” His *Far-Fetched Fables* was produced at the Watergate Theatre on September 5th, but they were too far-fetched for the critics. Shaw had once described them to me as “the noddings of a nonagenarian.”

On Sunday evening, September 10th, he was trying to lop a branch from a tree in his garden ; being a dead one, it came away too suddenly, and he lost his balance, falling and fracturing his thigh. He was taken in an ambulance to the Luton and Dunstable Hospital, and an operation was performed on Monday night. He made good progress, was visited regularly by his housekeeper Mrs. Alice Laden, and was bright enough to tell the surgeon, “It will do you no good if I get over this. A doctor’s reputation is made by the number of eminent men who die under his care.” A few days later it was discovered that his prostate gland had failed, and a minor operation was performed, as he was too old to bear the major one.

On Monday, October 2nd, Eleanor O’Connell called to see him at the Hospital where everything possible was being done for him. She asked how he was.

“Everyone asks me that ; it’s so silly when all I want is to die, but this damned vitality of mine won’t let me.”

“Are you looking forward to dying ? ”

“Oh, so much, so much,” he said tremulously. “If only I could die ! This is all such a waste of time, a waste of food, a waste of attention. But they won’t leave me alone.” Then, speaking loudly : “I’m in HELL here. They wash me all the time ; they massage me ; when I’m asleep they wake me ; when I’m awake they ask me why I’m not asleep—routine, routine, I’m sick of it. Each time they pounce on me they tell me it will be just the same as last time, and then I find they’ve added a new torture ! ”

"Never mind ; you are going home on Wednesday ; your room is all ready and looks most comfortable ; then you'll feel happier."

"Happier ? No. But at least I shall be able to die in peace. . . . Yes, I shall be glad to go home and get out of hell. Ah, if only I could walk ! I would get up and go home at once. I tell you I am in hell. I want to die and I can't, I can't." There was almost a sob in his voice, and the pleading tone of a prayer.

The nurse returned and Eleanour had to leave. She kissed him, saying "I shall never see you again, but for me you will never die." He kissed her, saying "Be off with you," and she thought his eyes were moist.

He was taken home on October 4th, and spent the final month of his life in comfort, displaying little interest in anything ; though when his secretary Blanche Patch read him a letter from Dr. Inge, he smiled and said "I must write to him." In the last days he slept a great deal, and early in the morning of November 2nd, 1950, he fell asleep for ever.

ASPECTS OF SHAW



Of the five articles that follow, the first three were commissioned by the British Council, the fourth was written for this book, and the fifth for a London daily paper

THE MAN

OWING to the general belief that seriousness is synonymous with dullness it is almost impossible to convince people that the gayest man of his age was its most serious writer. Yet such was the case, and Bernard Shaw was the man. They will not even believe that a wit and humorist can also be a consistent philosopher ; yet it is a fact that the creed which Shaw had preached in his thirtieth year was repeated by him without variation in his ninetieth. He had not changed, but the age had ; and he, more than anyone else, had changed it.

His seriousness, his consistency, his gaiety and his wit, were to some extent inherited from a mother who never made a joke in her life and a father who never could resist one ; but to this inheritance some impish ancestor had contributed the clown and playactor, which, more than any other strain in Shaw's nature, bewildered and shocked his contemporaries. He never seemed to be the same man for twenty minutes together. At one moment he was talking with vatic earnestness about the destiny of the human race ; at the next he was treating certain specimens of it with burlesque ridicule and sending his hearers into fits of laughter. A little later he was exposing some social abuse with a solemnity that would have impressed a convocation of clergy ; following this with a display of mental acrobatics that would have provoked the applause and envy of any knockabout comedian. If he did not stand on his own head, he usually managed to make other people feel that they were standing on theirs.

His own explanation of his public conduct is true so far as it goes, but it is not complete. He was nervous and timid by nature, he says, and so had to create a personality suitable to

the various parts he had to play. He saw things differently from other people, he states, and felt about them differently, so he found that all he had to do in order to get a hearing was to explain his viewpoint with absolute clarity and express his serious opinions with the utmost levity. Both these confessions should be amplified. He created a character adaptable to his parts because he was a born actor, not merely because he was nervous and timid ; and he put forward his views with levity because he was a born clown, not solely because he wished to gain an audience. It is the combination of actor and critic, of clown and prophet, that makes him unique in literature. His was not simply the gaiety of the great artist, like Shakespeare or Cervantes ; it was as if a great teacher like Socrates or Christ or Buddha could not resist the temptation to diversify his sermons with somersaults.

The result of these seemingly incompatible characteristics was that, until Shaw was seventy, very few people recognised his essential sincerity, to say nothing of his sanity. Time and *Saint Joan* produced a change ; but even up to the present day the majority associate his name with tomfoolery, and as late as 1940 someone wrote of him as "a macabre clown," which was not a wholly false description of one who considered that the death of a human being required comic relief instead of tears. Asked by an acquaintance whether he talked and wrote with his tongue in his cheek, Shaw replied : "My dear sir, if you really believe me to be serious, it is unnecessary for me to assure you of the fact. If you do not believe me to be serious, it is equally unnecessary to assure you of something you would not believe." Those who are not averse to the leavening of philosophy with buffoonery have never been in any doubt on the point.

His histrionic nature, however, was tempered with caution, a legal-mindedness that amounted to pedantry, an economical disposition that was almost old-maidish, and an apprehensiveness that made him as careful in thought as he seemed reckless in expression. For example, he attacked institutions, which are not sensitive, in preference to people, who are ; and when he did criticise individuals he added sugar to the pill, so that they

could swallow it without making a wry face. He seldom said anything which could easily be challenged, rarely did anything that would place him in an invidious position, and whenever he found it necessary to call someone a fool or a madman or both, he did it so charmingly and outrageously that the victim could not take offence, even going so far as to suggest that himself was more to be pitied than the person in question. When invited to lunch by a famous hostess, he evaded her wrath by refusing in these terms : " I shall have to dress myself carefully and behave properly, both of which are contrary to my nature." His hatred of fashionable life was declared with an exaggeration that amused instead of irritating its addicts : " Better the wards of the most terrible field hospitals than a drawing-room in Mayfair." It was the same in every department of life. Whatever he disliked he criticised in such a manner that everyone concerned in his condemnation either laughed or felt flattered.

Next to his love of clowning and his sense of caution perhaps his most noticeable feature was an almost limitless curiosity. He collected information about everything, as another man collects stamps or coins or first editions. Whenever he met someone who knew all about machinery or voice production or advertising or stained glass or medicine or indeed anything, he pumped that expert dry and stored up whatever knowledge gained by this means might be useful to him in the future. This of course helped him greatly as a dramatist, for it not only enabled him to speak with authority on a score of subjects but gave him first-hand knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men. Add a quick and acute observation of the various types of people he met, and it is easy to see why the characters in his plays are so effective, though naturally their originals complained that they had been burlesqued.

Shaw's tastes were simple. He did not require the stimulants and narcotics which other men take in order to endure life or to forget that they are alive : he was a vegetarian, a total abstainer and a non-smoker. He never played games, and his exercises were limited to walking and swimming, though he had a private one known only to his wife and domestic staff :

every night before going to bed he sang. Opera, oratorio, ballads, cantatas ; whatever was singable, soprano, contralto, tenor or bass, he sang. A life of luxury was repellent to him, and his only form of self-indulgence was overwork. His marriage was a partnership of "companionable and affectionate friendship," and he thought that "cases of chronic lifelong love, whether sentimental or sensual, ought to be sent to the doctor, if not to the executioner." Not sharing the tastes, habits, opinions and illusions of the vast majority of his fellow-beings, he felt himself cut off from his kind, an alien on earth. "My heart knows only its own bitterness," he said, "and I do not desire to intermeddle with the joys of those among whom I am a stranger. I assert my intellectual superiority—that is all."

We shall never know, and he could not have told us, whether it was an internal dissatisfaction with the world about him or the driving force of his genius that made him the slave of a diligence which is probably without parallel in literary history. "My rise to eminence was the effect of pure gravitation on my scriptorial industry," he asserted. Work to him was what meat and drink are to most human beings. He thrived on it, and kept at it until he was prostrated with exhaustion. Public speeches, pamphlets, committee meetings, prefaces, organisation of one thing or another, debates, interviews, criticisms, study of phonetics, letters to the papers, private correspondence, articles for the press on every imaginable subject : any one of these activities would have been sufficient to absorb the energy of an ordinary man. But Shaw was an extraordinary man, whose real stature will only become apparent when his period is seen in perspective. We are too near him to measure his height or to gauge his achievement.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

FROM THE time of Shakespeare onwards for some three hundred years the British drama was moribund. Now and again a masterpiece appeared, such as Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* or Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* or Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*; but it is broadly true to say that from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth the theatre was kept going by great actors, not by great dramatists. The genius of Shakespeare and the rise of Puritanism were responsible for the dearth of good playwrights during the seventeenth century: the first swamped them, the second suppressed them. The lampoons of Henry Fielding, which resulted in the establishment of a censorship by his chief victim Sir Robert Walpole, account for the fact that, for the next two hundred years, imaginative writers left the stage alone and concentrated on novels.

Just as the Restoration dramatists, with Congreve at their head, took their cue from France, so did the later Victorian dramatists; and when Bernard Shaw arrived on the scene the English theatre was dependent on cheap melodramas, adaptations, and plays which were modelled on the artificially constructed plots of two French writers, Scribe and Sardou. From 1895 to 1898 Shaw, as a dramatic critic, ceaselessly attacked the fashionable drama of the age, championed Ibsen, prepared the way for his own comedies, and incidentally wrote the wittiest and most provocative essays in the history of journalism. His attack was successful. The so-called "well-made" play gave place to the drama of ideas, and the Shavian Theatre was firmly established in the early years of the present century.

At first of course the London managers would not look at Shaw's plays. Instead of the *dénouements* and stale situations and commonplace sentiment to which they were accustomed, he gave them social satire, unconventional philosophy and brainy dialogue. One of his early plays was booted, another was censored, a third failed. Still he pegged away, and when his chance came in 1904 at the Court Theatre (under the management of J. E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville-Barker) he produced his own comedies, trained his own actors and created his own audiences. After that the London managers clamoured for his plays. But the critics, uninfluenced by box-office considerations, were not so easily persuaded, and for more than a generation many of them went on repeating that his plays were "not plays," an attitude he derisively encouraged by calling them conversations, discussions, history lessons, and so on. What made his work seem so novel was that he revived the classical technique of play-writing, applying it to modern problems: he adopted the methods of the Greek dramatists in order to deal with the topics of the hour. While the essence of his plays is as original as Shaw himself, their novelty lay in the fact that he used the theatre as another man would use a newspaper, a pulpit or a platform; many of his comedies are half-sermon, half-debate, and every conceivable subject is discussed, from love, marriage and family life to religion, science and politics, his laboriously acquired knowledge of social conditions and his creed as a socialist informing most of them. Being an inspired dramatist, not a manufacturer of entertainment, he did not plan or plot his plays in advance. While engaged on them he never saw a page ahead and never knew what was going to happen. The forms they took were inevitable, though he worked as carefully at the writing of them as the most industrious craftsman.

His first plays, which he labelled "unpleasant," dealt with slum landlordism, jealousy and prostitution; then came some "pleasant" plays, two of which *Arms and The Man* and *You Never Can Tell*, are now recognised as classical comedies. There followed *Three Plays for Puritans*, which were written to prove that the popular subjects of sex and adultery were not

the only interesting themes for dramatic treatment, and to preach the folly of punishment and revenge. Easily the best of these was *Caesar and Cleopatra*, which, by initiating a natural and humorous treatment of historical figures, has widely influenced modern drama and biography. After that Shaw abandoned his efforts to suit the stage and wrote simply what suited himself. In *Man and Superman* the long third act contains his creed as a Creative Evolutionist. Politics in *John Bull's Other Island*, the Salvation Army in *Major Barbara*, the medical profession in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, marriage in *Getting Married*, parents and children in *Misalliance*, phonetics in *Pygmalion*, followed in quick succession ; and the political implications in religious persecution were set forth in his most perfect drama, *Androcles and the Lion*, which appeared in 1913 and was dismissed by the critics as blasphemous and in bad taste. During the 1914-18 war he wrote *Heartbreak House* in the manner of Tchekov, and began his testament to the human race, *Back to Methuselah*, in which he postulated the necessity for the prolongation of human life to at least three hundred years, the reason being that until men and women could expect to live much longer than they do at present they would not seriously attempt to better their conditions. His fame as a dramatist was fitly sealed in 1924 with *Saint Joan*, which was a world-wide success ; and though he wrote eight or nine plays after that, none of them is on a level with the best work he produced before 1926, when he reached the age of seventy.

Apart from the peculiarity of genius inseparable from their creator, Shaw's plays are chiefly notable for their traditionalism ; though when first they appeared the critics thought them wildly original and undramatic in form, the performers thought them completely lacking in good "acting" parts, and the audiences did not know what to think. Actually, he used the technique of Euripides and Molière, he revived the idiosyncratic differentiation of character seen in Shakespeare, he provided the actors and actresses with enormously effective parts, such as had not been created by a British writer for nearly three hundred years, and he restored the long rhetorical speeches which are an important feature of primitive drama-

turgy. As a result, his is the only considerable repertory of classical plays and parts in the English language since the early years of the seventeenth century ; and his famous onslaughts as a dramatic critic on the reputation of Shakespeare were largely due to a desire to clear the ground before settling down to the job of supplying the modern stage with a living drama, just as his only comparable predecessor had animated the stage of a different epoch.

The two great playwrights cannot be compared, because Shakespeare was solely concerned with the portrayal of human beings and the expression of the human soul in poetry ; while Shaw was mainly concerned with ideas and philosophy, with making people think and giving them a faith. It is the difference between a pure artist and a prophet. But Shaw, too, was an artist, and many characters in his plays were admirably presented. What observation could do, his observation did. He saw people with exceptional shrewdness, and could exhibit their characteristics vividly, but he had not Shakespeare's mediumistic power of feeling and living his creations, and a great deal of Shaw's own kindliness and common sense is given to some of his characters where it is utterly out of place.

But let us do justice to what he did, not complain of what he failed to do. He renovated the British stage, which for generations had been shadowed by Shakespeare or deadened by the censorship. He gave back mind to the drama, awakened the social conscience of his age, made entertainment serve the cause of religion, proved that historical figures are as human and interesting as our own contemporaries, and recreated in the theatre what had long been absent from it ; an atmosphere of intelligent gaiety and good-fellowship.

THE REFORMER

NO ONE since the time of Tom Paine has had so definite an influence on the social and political life of his time and country as Bernard Shaw.

In the early eighties he was converted to socialism by reading Karl Marx ; whereupon he joined the newly-formed Fabian Society, and with Sidney and Beatrice Webb set to work to correct Marx's errors and to indoctrinate the Liberal Party with their own brand of socialism. For twelve years he spoke at least three times a week, at street corners, in parks and squares, in small rooms, in large halls, his audiences varying from a dozen people to a thousand or more. He never took a penny for his speaking or his work as a socialist, and risked imprisonment on several occasions. He thrived on opposition ; constant practice made him the best debater of his age ; and at last he was in great demand as a fashionable orator, a state of affairs so little to his liking that his public appearances became less and less frequent.

But in the eighties and nineties of last century he was indefatigable, and the Liberal Party in the House of Commons made a bid for popularity by adopting the Fabian programme and fighting an election on it. As Shaw and Webb had foreseen, this programme was dropped by the Liberals the moment it had served its turn at the polls, and the leading Fabians were ready with their sensational tracts, "To Your Tents, O Israel !" and "A Plan of Campaign for Labour." A direct result of their efforts was the formation of the Labour Party, which made its first appearance in parliament in 1906.

In all the fighting and propaganda which achieved this end Shaw had been the leading platform spirit, Webb the man who

had supplied the movement with its facts and figures, and it is therefore true to say that these two, ably seconded by their colleagues, put socialism on the political map of Great Britain and created the Party which has recently come to power.

Meanwhile Shaw's influence had been extended over other fields. His lectures to the Fabian Society dealt with religion, science, marriage, the family, medicine, diet, and indeed every subject about which there was any discussion at all. He attempted to give all the relevant facts, to suggest all the feasible remedies, to solve all the current problems. But the lectures were ignored by the press, and scarcely a word of them would have survived if their substance had not been recorded in the prefaces which he wrote for his volumes of plays. In this way he contrived to destroy any number of popular illusions, and the opinions of intelligent people to-day on such subjects as war and Christianity, science and sex, punishment and revenge, have been influenced by Shaw far more than they acknowledge, or perhaps recognise.

With his prefaces, his speeches and his plays, he made people think who never thought before. Even when his ideas were not original he popularised the ideas of others in such a way that the public became aware of them and interested in them for the first time. For example, his religion as a Creative Evolutionist gained more disciples by the production of *Man and Superman* than by over a century's reading in the works of Erasmus Darwin, Lamarck, Samuel Butler and others. From the moment that play appeared in 1905 Shaw became the idol of the intellectuals. The qualities in him that especially appealed to intelligent youth were his irreverence for tradition and office, his indifference to vested interests and inflated reputations, his contempt for current morality, his championship of unpopular causes and persecuted people, his vitality and humour, and above all his inability to take solemn people seriously. There was always something of the rebellious school-boy about him ; and when in *Man and Superman* Jack Tanner walked forward to congratulate Violet Whitefield on her courage in becoming a mother before becoming a wife, Shaw walked straight into the hearts of the new generation.

Since then his appeal has broadened. One of his earliest and slightest plays, *Arms and the Man*, which at the time of its production was considered an irreverent skit on patriotism and men of action, was hailed as a masterpiece by the generation which fought through the 1914-18 war. Another play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which was treated as an insult to the medical profession in 1906, has recently enjoyed a year's run in London and is now accepted by doctors themselves as a justifiable satire on their calling. The attitude of parents to their children, of children to their parents, of husbands and wives to one another, has changed so completely since Shaw wrote the prefaces to *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* that even the clergy dare not moralise on the claims of marriage and parenthood as they did before the Shavian eye was turned on the home. Yet another play, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, completely changed the general attitude to historical subjects and revolutionised the treatment of history in biography, drama and novel. In fact it is no exaggeration to say that Shaw's influence, directly or indirectly, may be felt in every branch of human thought.

Although they will not admit it, even the scientists have benefited from his intrusions. He claimed to be a scientific biologist, or, as he sometimes described himself, a meta-biologist.* Official biology in his day was completely dominated by the Mechanists and neo-Darwinists; and he fought them tooth and nail as a creative neo-vitalist evolutionist, taunting them with their failure to account for the difference between a live body and a dead one, and postulating a creative Life Force or Evolutionary Appetite, proceeding experimentally by trial and error, with mankind as its most elaborate instrument. There is consequently no problem of evil; the evils we suffer are the mistakes of the experimenting Life Force, which aims always at increased power and deeper knowledge. Shaw called himself a pioneer in science, though he had never worked in a laboratory and contemptuously dismissed laboratory experiments as "put-up jobs." His laboratory, he said was "the wide world, in which I can

control nothing except to a very limited extent my own mind." And he denounced the claims of the laboratory researchers to be exempt from moral law in their pursuit of scientific knowledge. Inhuman experiments by inhuman persons moved him to abhorrence.

On the whole science has gone Shaw's way and metabiology has come to its own again, which shows that he was quicker on the mark and could see a little farther ahead than the men who were actually doing the work. Many of his suggestions that seemed subversively revolutionary or fantastic when he first put them forward are now commonplaces, though the old view of their author as a comedian still persists long after its basis has dissolved. His influence on his own generation and the succeeding one was gained largely by the humour with which he presented his philosophy ; and though his jokes have now become facts, many people, to ease their consciences, continue to laugh at the joker.

HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

MOST WRITERS are thrilled when they see their work in print for the first time. Not so Shaw, who took his gift of literary expression for granted and who had knocked off innumerable articles, sketches, stories, etc., from the age of ten upwards before a letter from his pen appeared in *Public Opinion* on April 3rd, 1875, when he was eighteen years of age. Much of the other stuff he had written was sent to editors, none of whom thought it good enough to publish, and nothing less than a big religious revival was necessary to launch him into print. The evangelical firm of Moody and Sankey visited Dublin, and Shaw went to see them perform. Moody was the preacher, Sankcy the singer ; and they caused a sensation throughout Great Britain, for nothing satisfies the egotism of people so completely as an inquiry into the state of their souls.

Not a little of the mature Shaw may be sensed in the letter he wrote about these two spell-binders. When I produced it for his inspection in 1939 and asked what he thought of it, he said : " I am neither proud nor ashamed of it. It is written a great deal better than most fellows of my years could have written it ; but as I can now write better than the majority of octogenarians, it does not surprise me that I could then write better than the majority of adolescents. I believe I wrote another letter on the subject ; but as it was probably much longer than this, and the editor did not feel inclined to issue a special supplement for my contribution, it was lost to the world. However, the world has somehow managed to revolve without it."

Here, then, were the first words of Shaw to survive the editorial waste-paper basket :

SIR,

In reply to your correspondent "J. B. D." as to the effect of the "wave of evangelism," I beg to offer the following observations on the late "revival" in Dublin, of which I was a witness.

As the enormous audiences drawn to the evangelistic services have been referred to as a proof of their efficacy, I will enumerate some of the motives which induced many persons to go. It will be seen that they were not of a religious, but a secular, not to say profane, character.

Predominant was the curiosity excited by the great reputation of the evangelists, and the stories, widely circulated, of the summary annihilation by epilepsy and otherwise of sceptics who had openly proclaimed their doubts of Mr. Moody's divine mission.

Another motive exhibits a peculiar side of human nature. The services took place in the Exhibition Building, the entry to which was connected in the public mind with the expenditure of a certain sum of money. But Messrs. Moody and Sankey opened the building "for nothing," and the novelty, combined with the curiosity, made the attraction irresistible.

I mention these influences particularly as I believe they have hitherto been almost ignored. The audiences were, as a rule, respectable; and as Mr. Moody's orations were characterised by an excess of vehement assertion and a total absence of logic, respectable audiences were precisely those which were least likely to derive any benefit from them.

It is to the rough, to the outcast of the streets, that such "awakenings" should be addressed; and those members of the aristocracy who by their presence tend to raise the meetings above the sphere of such outcasts, are merely diverting the evangelistic vein into channels where it is wasted, its place being already supplied, and as, in the dull routine of hard work, novelty has a special attraction for the poor, I think it would be well for clergymen, who are nothing if not conspicuous, to render themselves so in this instance by their absence.

The unreasoning mind of the people is too apt to connect a white tie with a dreary church service, capped by a sermon of platitudes, and is more likely to appreciate "the gift of the gab"—the possession of which by Mr. Moody nobody

will deny—than that of the Apostolic Succession, which he lacks.

Respecting the effect of the revival on individuals I may mention that it has a tendency to make them highly objectionable members of society, and induces their unconverted friends to desire a speedy reaction, which either soon takes place or the revived one relapses slowly into his previous benighted condition as the effect fades, and although many young men have been snatched from careers of dissipation by Mr. Moody's exhortations, it remains doubtful whether the change is not merely in the nature of the excitement rather than in the moral nature of the individual. Hoping that these remarks may elucidate further opinions on the subject,

I remain, Sir, yours, etc.,

S.

Dublin

BERNARD SHAW

(AN OBITUARY)

THE THIRD child of a loveless marriage, Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on July 26th, 1856. A drunken but amusing father, an indifferent but music-loving mother, did much to produce the future "G.B.S.," whose naturally affectionate and emotional disposition was held in check by a sense of derisory comedy which made the circumstances of his youth and early manhood bearable. School was hateful to him, and six years in a land agent's office, even though he became a model cashier, was a period of penance. At the age of twenty he shook the dust of Ireland from his feet, travelled to London, and did not again see his native country until he was famous thirty years later. His mother had already left his father, had gone to London to teach singing, and was now to have the pleasure of supporting her son for nine years. She did not complain; she was only occasionally aware of his presence; he was simply a lodger who did not happen to pay his weekly bills.

They were years of wretchedness for the son. He wanted to write, and write he did, but no one wanted what he wrote. Friends and relations tried to push him into jobs, but he set his face steadily against earning a living in any way except as a writer; and since his articles were returned by every editor to whom he sent them, he determined to try his hand at realistic fiction. In five years he wrote five novels, filling five quarto pages methodically every day. Each novel was sent to all the leading London publishers, and each was rejected by all of them. Meanwhile he was reading books and studying music scores in the British Museum, looking at

pictures in the National Gallery, and walking the streets of London in clothes that had changed colour and become threadbare with age.

At last a friend he had made in the British Museum reading room, William Archer, forced him into journalism, and he began to review books and criticise paintings. But there was not much money in that, and it was not until 1888, when he was thirty-two, that Shaw started to earn a regular living as music critic for two guineas a week. This lasted for two years, and was followed by four more years as music critic to another paper at £5 a week, his career as a journalist closing after three and a half years as dramatic critic to *The Saturday Review* for £6 a week. No one before or since has written such vital, provocative, self-revealing criticism as G.B.S. He made all his readers sit up, curse him or cheer him according to their natures and convictions, and even those who detested his opinions could not help reading and discussing him. The professors were especially irate, but their successors now venerate him as a classic. He expressed horror at the end of his life when told by the present writer that his dramatic criticisms were creeping into the schools as text-books. "If that doesn't finish me, nothing will," he said.

While busy infuriating the pundits of music and the drama he was hard at work trying to revolutionise the world of politics and economics. With his friend Sidney Webb he had taken control of the Fabian Society, and, having corrected the errors of Karl Marx, they permeated the Liberal Party with their own brand of socialism. But the Liberals jettisoned the Fabian programme the moment they won the 1892 election on it, and the energies of Webb and Shaw were thereafter devoted to the formation of the Labour Party, which made its first appearance in Parliament in 1906. For over forty years Shaw sacrificed the greater part of his time to socialist propaganda, ceaselessly writing articles, pamphlets, books, serving on innumerable committees, organising, advising, debating, and speaking at all sorts of places to all sorts of people, from the East-End docks to the West-End drawing-rooms, from miners to millionaires. He also took part in the municipal

affairs of St. Pancras, first as a vestryman, then as a councillor ; and still he found time to be an active member of various executive committees concerned with music, literature and the drama. His keen business sense, his wide knowledge of whatever he took up, his diplomatic ingenuity, mental nimbleness, patience and good sense, kept the Fabian Society going when every other socialist group was wrecked by internal dissension ; while as an entertaining orator he had no equal, the mere announcement of his presence on a platform ensuring a full house and an overflow meeting.

Shaw attributed his health and energy to the fact that he was a teetotaller, a vegetarian and a non-smoker ; but this did not save him from a serious break-down in 1898, when he married, abandoned dramatic criticism, went to live in the country, and worked seriously at the business of play-writing. Already he had written eight comedies, but they had met with no success : one was censored, another enraged a Sunday night audience, a third was thought funny but crack-brained, a fourth so bemused the actors that it did not survive a few rehearsals, the rest were considered unactable. From which he learnt that audiences as well as players had to be created for his type of work. In the early years of the present century a young actor named Granville-Barker became an ardent Shavian, induced a manager to back him, and Shaw's reputation as a playwright was made between 1904 and 1907, when the King, the Prime Minister, front-bench politicians and fashionable society flocked to the Court Theatre and laughed heartily at *John Bull's Other Island*, *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *You Never Can Tell*. After that the West-End managers took him up, though for many years the critics, accustomed to murder or at least adultery with their theatrical bill of fare, would not allow that Shaw could write " a play."

His popularity was considerable when *Pygmalion* was produced in 1914, but war broke out that autumn and his displeasing comments on British diplomacy made him the most unpopular man in England. He was cut by friends, insulted by acquaintances, and daily received mail-bags

bulging with letters of abuse from people who were ignorant of what he had said. The war-fever subsided with the conclusion of hostilities and his popularity revived, reaching its zenith with the production of *Saint Joan* in 1924. Realising that whatever he published would now be received with respectful attention throughout the literate world, he spent the next three years writing *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, wherein he enunciated his economic creed and his belief in equal incomes for all. The Fabian doctrines having penetrated to Russia, he visited that country with Lady Astor in 1931. "They treated me as if I were Karl Marx," he said. "They received him as if he had been God," said Lady Astor. They certainly gave him a good time, and he had an interview with Stalin in the Kremlin.

Honours of all sorts were offered to him when he was about seventy and the official world felt that he had reached the age of discretion. He refused the Nobel Prize for literature; and when the Labour Party which he had done so much to create came to power, he declined a peerage, saying that he could not afford to be a duke, which was the least they could offer him. The Order of Merit was then proposed. "I have already conferred it on myself," he replied. At the age of ninety, however, he relented, and became an honorary Freeman of the city of Dublin and the borough of St. Pancras.

Although Shaw's influence on his age has affected literature, religion, science, politics and economics, his most enduring work was done for the stage, both as critic and dramatist. In his early years the British theatre was almost wholly given over to adaptations from the French, to dramas modelled on the plays of Scribe and Sardou, to patriotic bombast, to sentimental comedy, and to sensational melodramas made to fit the personalities of leading actors. Shaw frankly revived the classical tradition, but the critics did not spot his debt to Euripides, Shakespeare and Molière because of his unusual themes, unconventional philosophy and brilliant dialogue. His originality of mind blinded them to his unoriginality of treatment. But now that several of his comedies are accepted

as classics it is easier to see that, while the showman is like no one else, his tricks are as old as the drama.

The memory of the man himself will probably outlive his work. His amazing vitality, limitless curiosity, untiring industry and unfailing gaiety, his wit, sanity, good-humour and uncommon sense, his irrepressible frivolity and fundamental sincerity, his kindliness, genial toleration, lack of envy and malice, maddening self-assurance, and freedom from the foibles of average humanity : such a combination of qualities in one personality is unique in history, and will assuredly remain so.

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